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Walker, T. H.

Principal James Denney, D.D





*PRINCIPAL JAMES DENNEY, D.D.*







yours sincerely  
James Denney.



# *A Memoir and a Tribute*

BY

T. H. WALKER

Author of

*"Fellow-labourers : A Ministerial Septuary,"*

*"Clerical Cameos," "Impressions of Holland,"*

*"Travels in Russia," etc.*

WITH A PORTRAIT

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To  
ALL  
EVERYWHERE  
WHO ESTEEMED  
**Principal James Denney, D.D.,**  
THIS VOLUME  
IS DEDICATED  
AS A GRATEFUL MEMORIAL  
OF THE MAN AND HIS  
WORK.



## FOREWORD

As an Arts Student under James Denney's tuition in Glasgow University, where he first met the future Principal, the writer of this memoir came to cherish a high regard—which, in later years, developed into great reverence—for the man. His humility and true piety were remarkable, notwithstanding his immense learning and towering intellectual superiority.

Tributes have already been paid to his worth and work, and doubtless others will be forthcoming. In undertaking the writing of this volume, the author wished to have the satisfaction of casting a wreath of his own upon the mausoleum, already reverently hallowed with memorials of affection. The attempt has not been made to write an exhaustive, elaborate or critical biography, but, within limits, to give a picture, as true to life as possible, of a many-sided personality—a man of great talent, power and versatility, who impressed his generation, as few have done.

If, at the close of the memoir, the reader finds that such a faithful portraiture of Dr. Denney emerges, the writing of it will not have been in vain.

T. H. W.

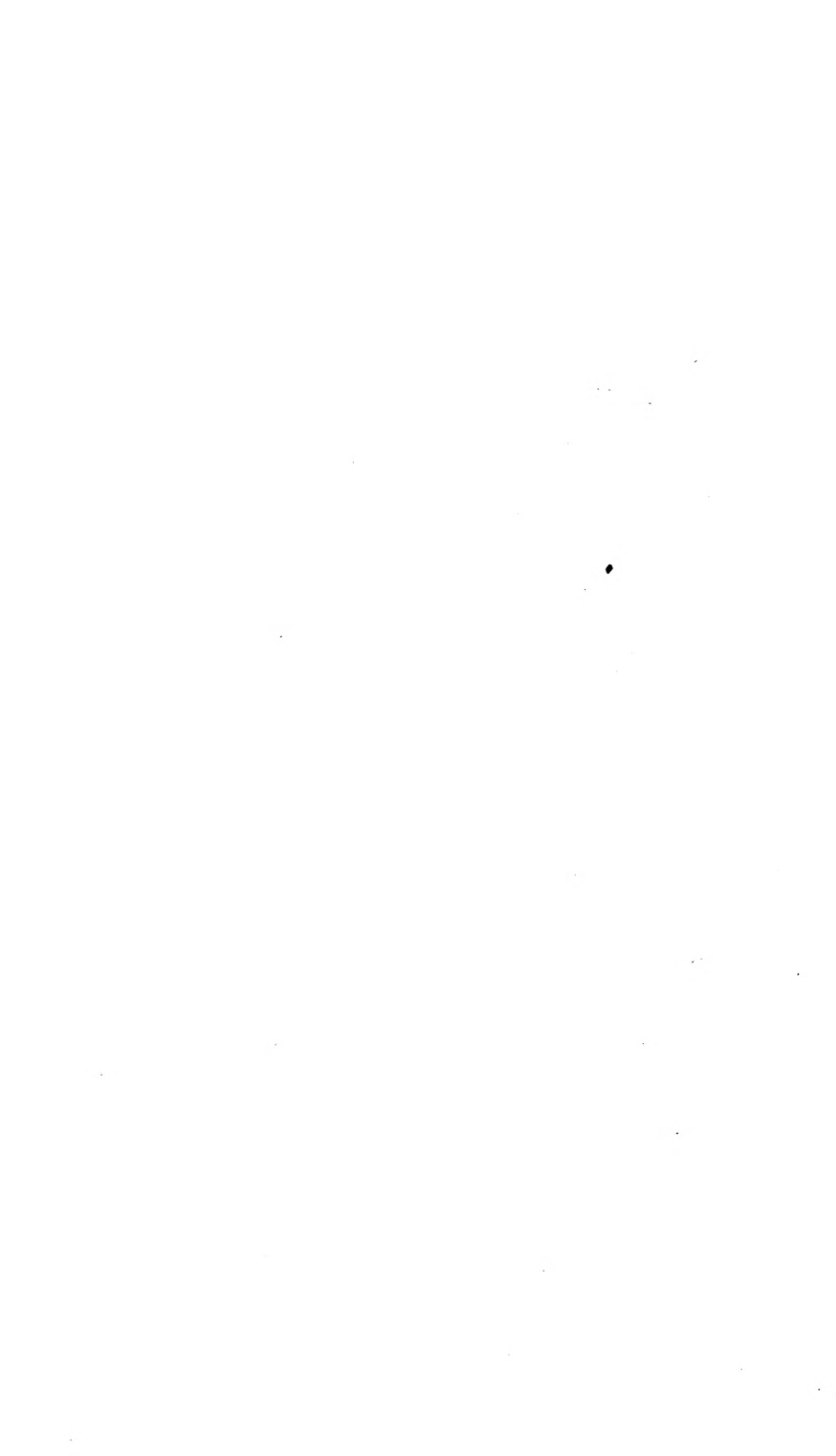
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*January, 1918.*



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*The  
Early  
Years*



# Principal James Denney, D.D.

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY YEARS

GREAT is the debt which the religious world owes to Scotland. If Germany before the days of her degeneration sent forth a company of intrepid Reformers, and England produced an army of noble martyrs, no less has Scotland nurtured a band of sturdy confessors, and theologians, whose outstanding careers are an abiding inspiration. The smaller denominations have not been less fruitful than others in giving us great Christian leaders in this Northern land—"Auld Lights," Cameronians, Burghers, Morisonians, have each had a group of devoted men, whose gifts of heart and mind added lustre to the Christian Church. While their loyalty to their own section was whole-hearted and uncompromising, they yet loved the brotherhood, and in turn their ability and goodness commanded the love and respect of all who knew them. Of these James Denney, who belonged originally to the Reformed

Presbyterian or Cameronian Church, is a conspicuous example. Writing at the time of his death and apparently under strong feeling, Sir William Robertson Nicoll said of him, "That he was in many respects the first man in Scotland, was coming to be acknowledged by every one. It is our own deliberate opinion that hardly any greater loss could have befallen the Christian Church, for he seemed destined to guide thought and action in the difficult years to come as hardly any one could but himself. . . . There is not a thought or a memory connected with him that does not stir our admiration and love. There is none like him—none. His loss is truly irretrievable." And this great Doctor of the Church, in effect and in reality, born in Paisley on 5th February, 1856, was of Cameronian stock, the sect which had its origin in the fierce and bitter controversies which took place in Scotland in the latter part of the 17th century.

His parents, worthy members of that communion, removed to Greenock when he was but four months old, and here his early life was spent in association with the Church of his fathers. Practically, therefore, a Greenock man, Denney had in later years, as intimates, two fellow-townsmen, the Rev. A. D.

Grant and the Rev. J. P. Struthers. These formed a trinity of kindred souls. Strong and grave, yet kindly and loving, they were bound each to each by the closest of moral and spiritual bonds—"Men of the knotted heart." Struthers belonged to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, although born and brought up in the Original Secession body, and his genius and consecrated life made a profound impression upon Denney. "I have never known a man who had so deep a sense of the love of God, or who so unmistakably had the love of God abiding in him" was the latter's testimony concerning his friend.

For twenty-seven years Struthers "edited," rather it should be said, he wrote *The Morning Watch*—a vastly different periodical from that which bore the same title in Edward Irving's day, and surely the most delightful of all Sabbath School Magazines. Denney loved the *Watch*, as he loved its editor, and helped it too. He once described the Magazine in these words: "It is just like reading a letter"; and once, when giving a list of the Hundred Best Books, he included *The Morning Watch* as one of the Hundred. The last page of the *Watch* Denney particularly prized, reading the monthly as soon as he received it, from beginning to end, but usually beginning at

the end. The choice combination and illustration of the texts he regarded as wonderful.

It has been said that to Struthers might be applied the words inscribed on Gordon's tomb in St. Paul's: "Always and everywhere he gave his strength to the work, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, and his heart to God." Such witness is high, but true. The playfulness and humour which made Struthers's talk so fascinating, and lightened his preaching and lecturing, were like sunbeams playing on the face of the deep. Perhaps the most gifted preacher of his time in the West of Scotland and a veritable man of genius, Struthers was yet very reserved, very shy, very humble, very lovable. A creator of pure fun of the whimsical order, he had also the touch of sadness that so often accompanies a playful wit. He was at once humourist and melancholian. He was notable as the man who, with characteristic modesty, declined the honour of D.D. from Glasgow University. He and Denney were to be "capped" together, but the latter confessed afterwards to a feeling of relief, as he felt himself so unworthy to stand on a parity with an already so great and real "Doctor of the Church" as Struthers.

The Reformed Presbyterians were proud of Struthers, as they had cause to be. He was their foremost preacher and expounder of the Word. Many of them were "characters" in their own way. Small Churches seem to be the cradle of such curious folk. Thus the Cameronians often used to make great sacrifices to attend preachings. Two of them, humble but honest and devout men, were wont to leave D——, their native village, to travel to Glasgow, a distance of over twenty miles, to hear a minister of their own *persuasion*. In the evening, after service, they travelled back half-way, but were obliged to stop in a moorland cot till next morning would fit them for their journey. On one occasion, being more than usually fatigued, one of them awakening about the middle of the night thus addressed his friend, "John, I'll tell you ae thing, and that's no twa—if they Auld Kirk folk get to heaven at last they'll get there a hantle easier than we do!"

These old Cameronians were not, however, a heavy, sour and joyless people, but the opposite. Many of them were possessed of a happy and contented disposition; their sense of humour was keen, their estimate of personal independence was high; they cherished profound religious convictions. The Denney

family continued their connection with the Reformed Presbyterian Church—in which the father, who was a joiner by trade, held office as a deacon—until the union of the majority of the members of that denomination with the Free Church of Scotland in 1876, Struthers electing to abide by the “remnant” of his old church, and thus remaining to the end “R.P.” But James Denney never forgot his obligations to the Church of his fathers. Here his earliest religious impressions had been received and his first efforts in Christian work engaged in. As Sir William Robertson Nicoll puts it, he “passed over to the Free Church, taking with him his serene but warm piety, his instinctive appreciation of dogmatic truth, and his hearty interest in the Church of Christ.” Here he had ample scope for the exercise of his gifts. For his class in the Sunday School, with scholars only slightly younger than himself, he prepared as carefully as if he were a preacher to a congregation of critical hearers. The influence of his teaching in those early days still abides, and is gratefully recalled. As a boy he received his early education at the Highlanders’ Academy of Greenock. Here he carried everything before him, and ere long surpassed in learning even his pastors and masters in that somewhat



noted institution. It is interesting to recall that at this period of his life he had as fellow-scholar in the old Academy, John Davidson, the poet, that hapless child of genius, whose father was at the time minister of the Evangelical Union Church of Greenock, a man of sterling worth and conspicuous ability.

The two lads also became colleagues as pupil teachers in the Academy. And yet how different the destiny of each as events proved! Both trained in the evangelical religion, and ending their career, the one as a master in Israel of the household of faith, the other a suicidal victim of vanity and unbelief. Davidson, like Denney, was a man of considerable gifts. He tried to stem the tide of French influence and endeavoured to create a new dwelling-place for the human imagination. There was, as has been pointed out by critics, a distinction between Davidson's work while he was still in Scotland and his later work. The early dramas are easily the best and sanest things he did, as indicating an abundance of creative power, a love of sunshine and the freshness and daring of youthfulness. But a change came when Davidson went to London, abandoned teaching, and set himself to write for bread. Hack-work he hated, and came to detest all com-

pulsion and to resent intensely the slowness of the world to recognize him, or to follow him. The last stage of his life was very bitter. He claimed to have anticipated Nietzsche. He read him and was influenced. The consequence was that he threw himself passionately against the world. He lived partly in profound despair and partly in turbulence and revolt. There was no background of faith to support him in view of his failure to win the popular success he sought, and *felo de se* on the cliffs of Penzance was the sad result. Davidson's meteoric success in London was a surprise to his contemporaries in the old Academy, for he clearly had little ability as a teacher, nor did he then appear to possess anything of the genius of greatness; but the boys of the Academy knew instinctively that James Denney was destined to make his mark in whatever profession he adopted. By nature grave and studious, gentle and kindly; in thought and expression, clear and fluent; in work, thorough and inspiring, he made a deep impression on the minds and lives of his scholars. As he stood before his class, in his favourite teaching attitude, balancing himself from toe to heel, they felt that to him the simplest theme was inexhaustible. Of an afternoon, at this period the lad would spend

hours at the bench in the workshop of his father's firm—Crawford & Denney, joiners. Doubtless he would give promise there of being as efficient in joinery as in teaching and theology.

Denney having reached the limit of the school curriculum, and being still too young to begin his course of training as a teacher—the profession which at the time he had in view as his life-work—made some acquaintance with business affairs in the office of Messrs. Liddell & Brown, tug boat agents, Greenock. Here he remained for two years or so and practised most assiduously the art of penmanship. His handwriting was good, but the manner in which he was accustomed to hold the pen was awkward, and he felt that he must develop a style appropriate for a teacher of the art. About this time H.M. Inspector paid a visit to the school in connection with an examination of the pupil teachers who purposed entering for the Normal Course of training. At the close of the ordeal, the Inspector summoned the candidates, with the exception of Denney, into his room and intimated that the papers handed in by the latter were in all his (the Inspector's) experience unsurpassed by any pupils who had faced that examination. This was a

high compliment to the youth, coming from such a quarter.

But schoolmaster, Denney was not destined to be. All the characteristics which distinguish the successful minister were already markedly present in the youth. His diligence, ability and thoughtful earnestness in the work soon made him notable above his fellows. He was admitted to circles and societies intended for far older pupil-teachers. His knowledge and learning were so conspicuous that the one and only goal now set before him was the Christian Ministry. To the attainment of this object, therefore, he bent his youthful energies.

*The  
Student*



## CHAPTER II

### THE STUDENT

LEAVING the Highlanders' Academy after four years' service as a pupil teacher, young Denney matriculated as an Arts Student at the University of Glasgow, in November, 1874. And here a prodigy appeared. No scholar of his time could equal him. In class he soon began to answer questions that nobody else could answer. His fame was established when he underwent successfully the ordeal of what is called in Glasgow "The Blackstone Examination." A gold medal, the prize founded by some old patron of learning, is given annually to the student who may profess to read the greatest number of Latin books, and translate any passage or passages selected by the professor, from the whole, correctly. Sometimes the ambitious would-be medallist would profess seventy or eighty books, say twelve of Virgil, six of Horace, ten of Livy, five of Cicero, and so forth. When the lists were given in, it was found that Denney's was prodigious, and when he took his seat on

the celebrated "Blackstone," the ebon marble chair of antique construction which stands in the Humanity class-room, he was greeted with applause. The examination was long and searching, but Denney came off with flying colours. The Rev. Professor Clow, D.D., a fellow-student in Arts in those days, testifies to the impression created by the student from Greenock as he rose in his place in the class-room at the Professor's call. Abnormally pale, almost to an oriental pallor, intent in look, direct in speech, he soon fulfilled the highest expectations cherished concerning him. A stillness at once fell upon his classmates as, in level tones and with perfect enunciation, the listeners heard a translation as loyal to the original as it was clean-edged and felicitous. Throughout the whole curriculum, Denney was his Professor's favourite pupil. The Jeffrey and Cowan Gold Medals, as well as the Blackstone, came his way.

For Professor Jebb, who was elected to the Greek chair in Denney's second year of Arts, the latter ever cherished the highest feelings of esteem. In an appreciation of his Professor he writes: "I have no hesitation in saying that he was by far the best teacher I ever knew, and that he made his subject



real and inspiring as few are able to do. What impressed the imperfectly prepared students, who had to do any work for Mr. Jebb, was the precision and finish of all his work for them. Most of us had no idea of what translation could be—whether from Greek into English or from English into Greek. His renderings of Sophocles, which have since become known to all the world, came on us like a revelation. He not only did the thing, but created an ideal for us by doing it. His interest I should say was in the poetry and history rather than in the speculative thought of Greece. He could not in any sense fraternize with his pupils, the main interests of most of them being too remote from his own, but he was most willing to help those who sought his guidance in his own field. After leaving the University I assisted him for some years in examination work, and know how sincerely he was interested in the progress of his men. In spite, however, of the sense of distance which was never quite overcome—or perhaps, even because of it—he gave many of us an idea from which we can never escape, of what a scholar can be. His professorship in Glasgow was a fortunate episode in the history of the University and in the intellectual life of its *alumni*; and though we could not grudge

his return to Cambridge, we felt that it would be hard to find any one who could hope to fill his place."

Old students of Professor Jebb will appreciate the justness of the tribute. All of us felt deeply the privilege we enjoyed of listening to the voice of one who combined the utmost fidelity to the Greek tongue with a diction that was unparalleled.

Denney was for a time assistant to Professor Veitch in the Logic Class. It was here that the present writer, as a student, first came into contact with him. What drew one's attention to this man with the slender frame, the scholar's stoop, the countenance "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," the intent look, the reticent manner, the metallic tone of speech, was his character rather than his career in Arts, brilliant as that had been. A few moments in his presence was quite sufficient opportunity to enable one to see that this was a "high-souled" man, calm in his manner, simple and modest in a marked degree, yet strong and determined in taking a stand, or advocating a principle—a man who uttered not sentiments as one who must say something, but rather as one who had something to say. This was the first and abiding impression. It only deepened on a

closer acquaintanceship ; and quite a generation later, on a casual meeting with him in a Glasgow tramway car—he was Principal Denney then—from his demeanour and his kindly inquiries, one realized again the moral influence which he had exercised over the plastic minds of his students in the long ago. His method, his thoroughness, his patience, his justness, his nice sense of honour, his devotion to duty, have left their mark on many men, far apart in time and in place and in work, but united in a common bond of affectionate regard for the memory of their old tutor.

In Professor Edward Caird's Moral Philosophy Class, Denney's phenomenally brilliant Arts career culminated in his securing the coveted gold medal. While esteeming this master in ethics most highly for his own and his work's sake, it has been asserted that he never accepted Caird's philosophy, and though learned in the history of philosophy, he declined to tie himself to any system, holding that one system gave way to another and that Christianity was bound up with none of them.

No branch of study came amiss to Denney. Even in Mathematics, as Professor Clow indicates, he held his place, although he used

to say with a smile, that, like Macaulay, he looked about for a footrule when certain questions were asked! He closed his Arts course by taking a double first in Classics and Mental Philosophy—the most distinguished student of his time. When he graduated with such high honours, it was said of him that he could have occupied with distinction more than one of the Chairs in the Arts Faculty of his Alma Mater. Such a Chair, indeed, seemed the appropriate goal of his brilliant scholastic course. But no! Theology, the “Queen of the Sciences,” claimed him, and whatever philosophy and literature may have lost, the Church of Christ has grandly gained by his submission as a student to her regal sway.

*The  
Theologue*



## CHAPTER III

### THE THEOLOGUE

NOT until five years had elapsed did Denney enter upon the study of theology proper in the Free Church College, Glasgow, now the United Free, an institution notable for the eminence of its professoriate, including as it did such men as Drs. Douglas, Lindsay, Candlish, Bruce, with Henry Drummond as teacher of Natural Science. On account of its methods of preparation, probably no other Church in the world has a better equipped ministry than the United Free Church of Scotland. There is a marked distinction between men so intellectually trained in this Church and others who enter the ministry upon easier terms, yet the preacher, like the poet and the prophet, must be born as well as trained. The pastoral instinct, for example, must ever find its best development in the school of experience. With some students it is easier to acquire than assimilate, and the preoccupation of a severe training may

occasionally restrict the faculty of judgment and the intuition of tact.

Denney, as a clear, far-seeing thinker, was at a later day the initiator of the movement towards a more modern equipment for our future ministers. He recognized that to the men and women of this age the message of the pulpit too often is no evangel. The reason, in great measure, is found in the fact that, according to the present method of theological training, the message sounds unreal—not a voice living, eager, and arrestive, but an echo indistinct and ineffective. He saw that the means and the end in ministerial training had fallen out of relation to each other. He held that the existing systems in divinity halls were too academic. It was not so much ministerial training that was given nowadays as theological education; it was not ministers that were being made so much as Bachelors of Divinity! Thus Denney distinguished between the trained theologian and the minister of Jesus Christ. The sphere of research for the former as a specialist may be the critical analysis of the hexateuch, or tracking the intricacies of the synoptic problem; but the latter should be instructed in the Christian religion, in the spiritual and moral condition of the world, in the intellec-



tual, social, and economic phenomena amid which men have to live and on which the ministry may cast the light of the Christian revelation, rather than be asked to spend much time over questions in theological science which have little relation to the vocation of the preacher.

Denney entered his theological Alma Mater at a somewhat more mature age than is usual with students, but he had the benefit of a fine mental furnishing, and here, as at the University, he maintained his reputation as the foremost student of his time. In the intervening years he had not been idle, fulfilling the conditions attached to the holding of the Clark Scholarship, tutoring at the University, and in general equipping himself fully for the work of the Theological College. A Continental tour also made about this period, when he sojourned for a considerable time in Germany, in the congenial company of his intimate friends Professor (now Sir) Henry Jones, Glasgow University, and Professor Hugh Walker, Lampeter College, Wales, served to widen his mental outlook. In the Glasgow College, in due course, Denney came under the stimulating influence of Professor A. B. Bruce, who was ever to him "the true master of his mind." So much was he im

pressed by Bruce, and so warm an admirer was he of his work, and especially of his Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, that he remarked concerning his teacher, "He let me see Jesus!" Bruce held Denney in equally high regard, and on one occasion, it is recorded, called upon him to give an exegesis of a passage in Colossians to a class of senior students, and the class, so far from resenting the liberty, felt themselves honoured. Denney in the course of his theological curriculum had a spell of what might be termed Broad Churchism, but when he and his Professor came to the cross-roads, Bruce took one way and Denney another.

While reticent as to his own spiritual history and experience, he was ever an evangelical believer. His thorough scholarship, his exegetical insight, his firm grasp of the great doctrines of the Christian faith, were all subservient to that.

Denney did a wise thing when as student he became also missionary to the Rev. (now Dr.) John Carroll of Free St. John's Church, Glasgow. His special sphere of labour was in East Hill Street schoolroom, Gallowgate. Here he found a moral and spiritual clinic under the superintendence of the minister, who, it is said, was almost forced at the time

into acceptance of the pastorate of St. John's by Denney, who only agreed to become his assistant on condition of his taking up that work. In East Hill Street he carried on the Mission with the diligence, ability, and success that might have been anticipated in such a strenuous worker. On the conclusion of his term of office, a Men's Class which he had originated and taught, presented to him a large parallel edition of the revised New Testament, and a handsome walking-stick, gifts of regard which he very highly prized. During this novitiate Denney lodged in Grafton Street, Glasgow. The "digs" were oftentimes the scene of memorable *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, particularly when Mr. Carroll and his elder Mr. Salmon (a well-known Glasgow architect and chosen friend of Denney, in whose social intercourse the latter delighted) would drop in of an evening and exchange sentiments regarding most things in heaven and on earth, or even under the earth!

This period of Denney's career was marked by his first contribution to theological literature, written at the suggestion, it is said, of Professor Bruce. It was anonymous, and took the form of a trenchant review of Professor Drummond's *Natural Law in the*

*Spiritual World*, and was intended to counteract the teaching of that work. The criticism was a wonderfully able one, and altogether the *brochure*, which bore the title "Natural Law in the Spiritual World, by a Brother of the Natural Man," was a remarkable production, when it is remembered that Denney but a short time before had sat at Drummond's feet as one of his students. Afterwards, it is believed, Denney revised certain of his strictures on Drummond's work, to the author of which, like many more, he felt indebted for giving to the Christian public a fresh and stimulating volume.

Another early literary venture was his joint editorship with Professor Bruce of the *Union Magazine*, in which many suggestive theological articles appeared, fruits of a sympathetic collaboration of master and pupil. Undoubtedly Denney, like other students, owed much in the way of intellectual stimulus to Bruce, although in most matters, without either undue self-depreciation or self-assertion, he could be trusted to take his own line. But to the younger man it was matter for justifiable pride, and more than a coincidence, that he should be called upon to be Bruce's successor both in his congregation and in his Chair in the Glasgow College.

*The  
Preacher*



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PREACHER

ON the completion of his University and Theological Hall training, and when he had become Bachelor of Divinity, Denney was duly licensed by the Presbytery of Greenock. Immediately thereafter, in 1886, in his 31st year, he was unanimously called to be minister of East Free Church, Broughty Ferry, in succession to the Rev. A. B. Bruce, D.D., who had been appointed to the Chair of Apologetics in Glasgow College. Broughty Ferry is a desirable place of residence. Save for the old Castle to which it owes its origin, and is indebted in turn for its own remarkable prosperity to Dundee, the town is wholly modern. It consisted a century ago of only a few poor fishers' huts. But the pleasant site, fine air, and social amenities have marked it out for "Dundee's Country House," and its sloping links have year by year become more thickly studded with the handsome villas of the merchant-princes of the jute Metropolis. The "Jute Lords," and other representative men in the multiform com-

mercial concerns, which have made the city what it is to-day, constituted a not inconsiderable portion of Denney's congregation. Highly favoured are the residents in this town of many mansions, in their lot and heritage, as also in their charming outlook over the Tay, and the emerald slopes of Fife. But still more privileged were they in their religious opportunities in Denney's time.

Memories of Thomas Dick, the author of the *Christian Philosopher*, who spent his last twenty years in Broughty Ferry, still linger round the place. Otherwise the mental atmosphere is stimulating; and to Denney the sphere of service was most of all attractive because he had in Dr. Bruce's famous treatise on "The Training of the Twelve" a high standard of pulpit exposition set before him by which to test his own work from week to week. A very brief period sufficed to prove to his people that they possessed in their young minister a scholar and preacher whose learning and force were equal to those of his eminent predecessor. The years as they passed added to his reputation. He preached "Christ and Him crucified" with an ever-increasing power. The effect was patent in the tense stillness and deep absorption with which he was listened to by his interested congrega-



tion. With no adventitious aids such as gesture or declamation, but ever making use of the fitting and telling phrase, he showed at once how profoundly he could think and also strive after pulpit lucidity. He had the faculty of making himself understood by the common people—the folk “whom God must love so much because He made so many of them”! At times his sermon was neither doctrinal nor critical, exegetical nor academic. This erudite theologian was not afraid, on occasion, to preach in non-professional fashion. He could meet his hearers on the lowest planes of thinking, so that the most unlearned among them might be able to apprehend all that was said. His literary products showed how profoundly he could think, his sermon often indicated how anxiously he would strive after *parrhesia*—pulpit boldness as well as pulpit brightness. Such discourses were popular in the truest sense. They were of what is called the appellative-argumentative order. The preacher was, so to speak, running along a double line of rails, simultaneously arguing in order to reach the intellect and also appealing so as to touch the conscience. There was the impact of mental force, the sermon at the same time having the effect of a moral

inculcation on the hearer. Perhaps emotionalism at times was lacking, that rare quality in any preacher which sets the heart, of the speaker and hearer alike, throbbing with sympathy. In this particular, Denney might occasionally show the defect of his qualities even in a high order of pulpit discourse. The only stricture that even the acutest critic could pass in such a case was the comparatively mild one, that the power was greater than the pathos. Indeed his wife used to tell him laughingly that there was not enough pathos in his sermons. Even she, however, could not gainsay the fact that there was a deep evangelical warmth and tone. It is manifest here, in a sermon on the text "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. xi. 6).

"There are many people who seem to spend their whole life—I mean their whole religious life—in a kind of process of negotiation with Jesus. Jesus has said, 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life,' and they want to argue it with Him. They want to negotiate with Jesus, see if there cannot be some kind of compromise made for them, whether for their particular case the strait gate cannot be made wide, whether for their particular benefit and use the

narrow way cannot be made broad, and they are all their lives long trying as it were to get special terms from Jesus for themselves. Dear friends, there is nothing, there is nothing at all in that kind of negotiation. That is not the way our Lord deals with men. The love of Christ is infinite and the love of Christ is infinitely inexorable. He never lets down His terms, He never makes the strait gate wide, He never makes the narrow way broad, He never makes the pearl without price cheap, He never asks less than everything, and happy is the man who comes to see that and to understand that that is the only way to life. When our Lord speaks to His disciples, what does He say? 'What man who is going to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost whether he is able to finish it?' That is what the Christian life is like. It is like going to build a tower; it is not like building a hut or a coal cellar, or building a cottage even, it is like building a tower—a magnificent structure, something that will cost a great deal and that a man should not begin unless he feels it is in him to go through with.

Or again, He says about the same thing, 'What king going to make war with another king will not sit down first and see whether

he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?' What is the king doing who is compared to a Christian? He is a king going to make war; he is not a king going to get a ride round the garden before breakfast or any little thing like that, which he does not need to think about or that it does not matter much whether he does it or not. It is like going to war, prepared to give his life, and going to do the greatest thing and taking the greatest risk that a king could take. And to be a Christian is to be like that. No man should do it, no man should feel he is doing the kind of thing that Jesus asks unless he feels he is doing an unimaginably great thing, taking the greatest risk and taking it for the greatest prize. There is no kind of joy even in earthly relations like the joy of losing everything to get everything, giving the whole of one's self to get the whole of another; and it is the whole-hearted committal of the life to Christ and the whole-hearted renunciation of everything that keeps it for His sake, it is on that that this happy benediction is pronounced, 'Happy is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.' The word 'blessed' used in these benedictions of Jesus always denotes the highest kind of

happiness, the happiness on which God congratulates man, and God wishes joy. God pronounces joy over the man who can give up everything to win Christ. . .

“ Many people are offended because Christ requires men to become His debtors for a debt which they can never repay. In one way of it the Christian life always begins with a great humiliation. Christ comes to us as One without whom we cannot take the first step in the new way of life ; even to begin it we must be infinitely and for ever indebted to Him. How do we need to begin ? All we sinful men need to begin with the forgiveness of sins. Now when we think of it, when we think of the forgiveness of sins, what are we to say ? We cannot earn it, we cannot claim it, we cannot take it for granted, we must go into debt for it, and we must go into debt to Christ. That is the very heart of the Gospel. Christ brings the forgiveness of sins and He brings it at an unspeakable cost. Christ died for the ungodly : ‘ in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.’ Now, that, strange to say, is the thing that many people cannot get over ; there is the sharp edge of the stone of stumbling by which they are repelled They

cannot humble themselves to be Christ's debtors for this unspeakable gift. No man ever was made happy, no man ever will be made happy by refusing to come under this obligation to Jesus, by resolving to be independent of Him and to maintain his independence ; and on the other hand blessedness comes, blessedness certainly comes and surely comes, to the man who stands at the Cross of Christ and says :

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

“ I say there is no doubt in the least that the happiest, the most joyful hearts in this world are the hearts that have attained, that the gladdest songs are those that spring from lips inspired by that great surrender and that great blessing ‘ to Him that loved the souls of men, and washed us in His blood.’

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in Thee I find.

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I stand upon His merits,  
I know no other stand.

“ These are the authentic voices in which human souls have uttered the deepest blessedness that human souls can know, and it is the blessedness of those who are not offended in Christ because He wishes to put them in His debt. Oh, that anybody who has been

holding back from Christ in that kind of reserve or reluctance or pride, anybody who has been doing that, may lay these things to heart and consider whether he is going in a way in which blessedness lies. 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.' "

Denney was ever a true preacher of the Word. He had no ambition to be known as the "popular" preacher. Ah, that blessed word "popular," how potent it becomes in certain quarters. It is recalled how even the distinguished Principal John Caird, when first settled in the quiet rural parish of Errol, where he laid the foundations of his fame, could not be said to be a favourite with some at least of his parishioners. The church building was much too large for the people who attended, and the young divine suggested the boarding up of a portion of the premises. This, however, was opposed by an irate elder who sought to impress his views on the minister by saying, "We'll maybe get a mair pop'lar preacher when ye're awa'." No more than Caird at first, did Denney draw crowds to hear him like Chalmers or Spurgeon, of both of whom he was a profound admirer; and he would say at times that he had no desire to be a great but only a useful preacher. Yet never did he mount the sacred rostrum without the genuine

preacher's earnestness of purpose and intensity. He had veracity of utterance—a special air of truthfulness seemed to distil from him. The pulpit was his throne, and from thence he spoke with authority to men the great things of God. His one volume of published sermons, *The Way Everlasting*, gives evidence at once of his theological insight and practical wisdom, and also of his quiet yet intensive power. The style, as has been said, cuts clean as a blade of Damascus.

He wrote once to a friend: "In the course of my Bible studies I have come to have a great faith in the obvious, and to feel that what we have got to do in preaching is not to be original, but to make the obvious arresting." And truly, few present-day preachers could arrest mind and heart and conscience as he could. Even his first written work, by which the Church at large began to estimate his power as an expositor, was not only replete with fine scholarship, but throbbed with spiritual passion. It was in the fifth year of his ministry that he issued his volume on the *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, and a little later the one on the *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, both in the "Expositor's Bible" Series. They were preached largely to the Broughty Ferry congregation. These works show Denney to



be, what in every sense he was, the scholar, thorough, accurate, impartial, critical, but also far more than that. He was a great moral and religious force, an eminent Christian doctor of his generation, a kind of national conscience to his ministerial brethren in all the Churches. What was said about a celebrated preacher may be said about Denney. "His inmost spirit has been busy with the New Testament doctrines, as one who lived in the presence of great subjects, subduing him, restraining him, calling for self-recollection and sober words." He "toiled terribly" and at length arrived at a style of writing which was the *acme* of lucidity. Thus too he came to speak with a readiness, clarity and keenness which were almost unexampled. For years he wrote none of his sermons, and one might listen to him in critical mood and yet fail to note a sentence unfinished, a phrase incomplete or a word misplaced. It was in this way that he came to be the unique teacher, theologian, and leader that he proved himself. He had a perfect passion for preaching the Gospel of righteousness.

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll has told us that Denney was reticent in regard to his spiritual history, "but," he says, "we believe that his

wife, who gave him the truest and most perfect companionship, led him into a more pronounced evangelical creed. It was she who induced him to read Spurgeon, whom he had been inclined to despise. He became an ardent admirer of this preacher and a very careful and sympathetic student of his sermons. It was Spurgeon perhaps as much as any one who led him to the great decision of his life—the decision to preach Christ our righteousness.”

These men, Spurgeon and Denney, were great Puritans both—that they were the last of the race we are loth to admit—and each was master of a pure Saxon style of speech. Each also had learned to write with a majestic sense of simplicity, precision, and directness, and with a resolute limitation of ordinary statement by the severity of facts. And to one good woman—too early taken, alas!—who made his home-life so happy, is largely due the credit of the evangelical basis of her husband’s thinking, teaching, and preaching. Mary Carmichael Brown’s memory—a very precious one and too sacred a topic to be written of here—is indeed blessed.

In Broughty Ferry, Denney the scholar, so well read, and the teacher, so deeply thought, gave himself to the plain and simple duties

of the pastorate with a faithfulness and appetency which won the regard, not only of his own congregation, but of the general community as well. He had the qualities of the true Christian pastor, simplicity and modesty in a marked degree, manliness in taking a stand or in advocating a principle, nobility and unselfishness of disposition. To his intimates he was the truest, warmest, and tenderest of friends. Albeit he showed none of those social embellishments that make a man popular among his fellows. At times a remarkable restraint, not to say coldness, manifested itself in his demeanour.

He was ever ready to serve a ministerial brother of his own Church or of any other Church on the smallest occasion, and in the humblest sphere. The Rev. Kirkwood Hewatt, M.A., late of Prestwick, writing in this connection of the modesty, simplicity, and unpretentiousness of Denney, after he had become the famous preacher and divine, says :—

“Let me give an instance. Some time ago there preached for me at Prestwick an eminent divine who apparently believed in the Philosophy of Clothes, for he brought with him a portmanteau in which was a varied assortment of ecclesiastical wearing apparel.

Of the inventory I remember the following : A pulpit gown, a long cassock reaching to his heels, a cincture, a university hood, and bands. There was also a large, handsome sermon-case, as if such alone were worthy of the manuscripts it contained. Quite an elaborate toilet, with many glances at the mirror, was necessary before the great man was ready for the services of the day. In spite, however, of all this tailoring, millinery, and finery, he preached well. Later I had occasion to be associated with Dr. Denney in the conducting of services in a church in Glasgow. He was to take the morning and I the evening service. I attended the church in the earlier part of the day, and was with the Doctor in the vestry before the service.

“He was dressed as an ordinary layman, the white tie alone differentiating him. I thought perhaps he intended to preach just as he stood before me, but almost at the last moment he took down from a peg a plain Geneva gown which he saw hanging there, and thus clothed upon, with no glance at any mirror, in due time followed the church officer to the pulpit. But as he proceeded with the service in his earnest way the simple attire appeared to add to the deep impression he was making on the congregation.”

James Denney preached incessantly throughout his strenuous career—generally twice every Sabbath. During the Broughty Ferry ministry, despite all his literary efforts, which must have made considerable inroads on the time at his disposal, he gained, as we have seen, the reputation of being a faithful pastor, who took a keen and intelligent interest in the general welfare of every member of his congregation—even in the “lambs of the flock.”

A large part of Denney's pulpit work, as was fitting, went to the production of his first published volumes. It is well for the religious public that it is so preserved. For it is on record that when he left Broughty Ferry for the Chair of Systematic Theology in Glasgow, he made a bonfire of all his written sermons up to that date. Such a holocaust has parallels. Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, when concluding his ministry at Kelso, on leaving for London to start the *British Weekly*, did the same with his sermon MSS. It was at the request of Sir William, who was at the time editor of the “Expositor's Bible,” that the minister of Broughty Ferry gave his first two volumes to the public. Denney may have been but following his mentor's lead in the burning of the sermons. There is certainly no

historic parallel in the incident referred to in Acts xix. 19. There the documents committed to the flames and reduced to ashes were worth "fifty thousand pieces of silver." They were famous in the ancient world. Literature of the kind had a special worth. It was supposed to be invested with a mystic virtue. Like Denney's sermons, the MSS. were calculated to awaken many a tender association and thrilling incident in life. Notwithstanding that—and here is the only correspondence in the case—conscience would have them go. Prudence might have pleaded, "Keep them but do not use them any more, or, if you do not keep them, publish them and give the proceeds to the poor." No! Conscience is deaf to such pleadings, and her stern voice fulminates "Burn them, burn them!"

*The  
Professor*





## CHAPTER V

### THE PROFESSOR

JAMES DENNEY'S preaching power had now begun to win him fame even of an international kind. While minister in Broughty Ferry he was invited to deliver a course of theological lectures to the students of Chicago Theological Seminary, one of the "schools of the prophets" of outstanding merit in the States. The lectures were published at the request of the Faculty of that institution, and few books have exercised a more potent influence throughout the religious world. The lectures when delivered attracted crowded audiences and gave rise to the keenest discussion. The University of Chicago set its hall-mark on their remarkable freshness and power, laureating this new teacher with its Doctorate of Divinity, a degree most rarely conferred on any preachers, either American or British. The distinction brought Denney still more prominently before the ministry and membership of his own church, and he was thus marked conspicuously for the first vacant Chair in any

of the Colleges. The opportunity came when he was appointed to succeed the late erudite Dr. James Candlish in the Chair of Systematic Theology in Glasgow Free Church College, but it was not without a pang of regret that Denney left his attached congregation in Broughty Ferry for the even more responsible work of being a teacher of teachers in the great city of the West. This man who was now, above others, making for our Scottish scholarship a name and a fame throughout the civilized world, realized that it was through the opportunity given him by this congregation that he had been enabled to build the rich and noble edifice of his great learning. The eleven years spent in his first pastorate, he once told a friend, were the happiest years of his life. In a very reverend and beautiful sense his successor in the Broughty Ferry congregation, the Rev. Frank Cairns, has said, "Dr. Denny was minister of the East Church till the day of his death." Never a year passed without his appearing in his old pulpit. But the call of his Church to the larger service was imperative, and Denney entered upon his great task, now recognized as one of the most distinguished theologians of his generation, possessing that remarkable combination of qualifications—even for a professor

—great scholarship, deep spiritual insight, keen critical power, and a unique gift of lucid and effective statement. He responded to the summons of his Church with the full intention of making not merely scholars and ministers, but also believers. For this was a very true, profound, and noble Christian gentleman who made his advent within the Glasgow College walls. It was seen that resolution, collectedness, consciousness of equipment were salient features of his character, together with a quiet finality of tone. His presence in the classroom at once created a feeling of the reality of the innermost, deepest and most sacred things in religion—the holiness and love of God, the riches of the great salvation, the authority and decisiveness of the voice of Christ, the ineffable worth and incomparable happiness of the Christian life, the wonder of the immortal hope. Little marvel that students began to be attracted to the Glasgow College by the combined fame of Dr. Denney and Dr. George Adam Smith, who was then in the Hebrew Chair, and who had by this time attained an enviable fame. Young men of different nationalities, eager and aspiring, were to be found sitting at the feet of these peerless teachers. Side by side have been seen Jew, Indian, Japanese,

Italian, men from the States and Canada, Englishmen, Irishmen and Welshmen as well. Every foreign student took at least one session under Denney. Post-graduates, too, were to be seen amongst the number, men who had given up a year of active ministry to gain the stimulus of work and the enrichment of mind which every diligent student received in Denney's class. In the College his personal influence as a spiritual force was great. He was a living conscience among the men. A favourite phrase of their professor was "creating a conscience," and this he did himself. For even more prominent than his teaching was the high standard of duty and responsibility he set up for those who would be ministers of Jesus Christ. He demanded honest preparation from his students. To the man who skulked he could be terribly severe. On occasion, the whole class has feared and trembled, and been sorry for the student who came under his lash. And yet there was no temper shown. He did not storm or rage as others would have done. He let his class see when anything displeased him, but only in a stern, quiet way. Consequently there never was inattention, as there might be in the case of other teachers. All was tenseness and alertness, and no one dared

to take liberties lest he should bring down a severe rebuke on his own devoted head. For the professor could reprimand and criticize severely, and be very caustic, sometimes almost mercilessly so, as when he referred to a certain hapless wight as "not having the ghost of a glimmering of an idea of what he is talking about."

On the other hand, Denney would praise also, with frank and full generosity. To anything that indicated patient toil he gave unstinted commendation.

Students sometimes felt rather shy of Dr. Denney, and were overawed by him, and possibly he was a little shy himself. There was even at times a suspicion of coldness and distance between professor and student. When the reserve was overcome, however, the professor showed himself intensely human. He was friendly and genial in the side-room, or when he was "at home" to the men. Many thought differently of Denney after an evening spent in his study. He had the knack of making the students open their minds to him in private. They always found him kind and patient and considerate when they broached spiritual or intellectual difficulties. If his answers failed to satisfy, he yet left the impression of his sympathy with the questioner.

At the College he was the final court of appeal in all matters pertaining to theology. "What is Dr. Denney's view?" was quite a common query when some knotty problem was under discussion in the lobby or at the dining-table in the hall. He was Sir Oracle among the men. With all the ardour of hero-worshippers they reckoned the final word unspoken till he had had his say. His judgment, ever weighty, carried with it universal respect. With all his great gifts he was one of the most modest of men, simple to a degree in his manner, and wholly free from pretentiousness of any kind. He never tried to shine in society, but could appraise it at discretion.

The Rev. Robert McKinlay, M.A., East Kilbride, recalls how Dr. Denney once told, with great good humour, a story of Spurgeon and his love for the weed. Mr. McKinlay had himself related a tale on this subject to the professor, and the latter, by way of rejoinder, said, "I know a better one. An old lady met Spurgeon one day, and remonstrated with him about his smoking. Spurgeon replied, 'I do not see any harm in it as long as one does not smoke to excess.' 'And pray, Mr. Spurgeon, what would you call smoking to excess?' Then came the withering retort, 'Madam, smoking two cigars at once!'" This story

Denney told with extreme relish and abandon. It recalls that other about Spurgeon being quizzed as to his alleged tobacco smoking propensities by some *quid nunc*, who was met with the rejoinder from the famous preacher, "Friend, I cultivate my own garden and burn my weeds!" Denney himself had a very strong sense of humour, in spite of his tense and keen nature. No one could be lighter in touch and more genial or à propos than he, say in an after-dinner speech or at some informal function. His deep humanness and humour were a constant revelation to those who were admitted to his friendship.

These features came out in his conversation, and also, as for instance, in an hour of relaxation from severer studies, over a game of whist—his chief recreation even to the last—a pastime in which he maintained not only a keen interest but a certain facility in play. As an out-door diversion, and doubtless for health's sake, he had recourse to cycling in his later years, but did not persevere in this, probably finding it a rather independent and solitary sort of sport. He did much walking, even refusing to take cabs or tramcars on Sundays for far-off preaching engagements, in the city or suburbs. Only latterly, when constrained by weather or physical inability, did he use

these means of conveyance on the sacred day. His brisk, sharp pace, and purposelike air when on duty or business intent, were conspicuous upon the streets of Glasgow.

Professor James Moffatt, D.D., says that people sometimes spoke of Denney as a great force, but those who knew him could not think of him as a force: he was human; a grave, rich, generous personality, who never talked down to you, who gave you of his best, who never domineered, who came to move as easily among many men as he did among many books, and who impressed you with the conscious sense of being far more than anything he said or did, or wrote, no matter how you admired those products of his mind. And similarly the Rev. Professor Carnegie Simpson, D.D., of Westminster College, Cambridge, testifies: "There was no kind of ignorant narrowness about Denney. He was as critical as he was conservative, and knew when to be agnostic, as when to be dogmatic; all his thinking had moreover the spacious and furnished background of not merely ample philosophical, theological and critical knowledge, but also a really wide humanistic culture. His acquaintance with letters was remarkable. He knew authors through and through, and could appreciate all types. I have heard him in one mood quote



whole passages of Dante or the Greek tragedians; in another, reel off with not less than passion verses of Catullus. It needs, however, more than mere reading to make the true humanist; and Denney had more. He had the really experiencing mind. He knew more than what authors had said about life; he knew what human life really is and means."

While theology, as we have seen, was the chief concern of Dr. Denney's life, it therefore by no means summed up his abounding intellectual interest. His joy was to revel in the great literature of the world, a joy expanded beyond the usual range, because of his superb linguistic acquirements. "He loved Homer and Shakespeare, Goethe and Burns, Burke and Johnson. The great humorists were his constant refreshment. A literary lecture from his lips had the savour and sympathy of a true humanism no less than the unerring appreciation of moral aims. It cannot be doubted that had Dr. Denney given himself to literature, his insight and faculty of expression would have produced work of enduring value."

It was indeed a great treat to hear him lecture on such a topic for instance as "Samuel Johnson." The present writer recalls such an experience, on a dull November afternoon

in the hall of a West End Church, in Glasgow, where Denney was announced to speak. There were but a handful of people present, the gathering being under the auspices of a Ladies' Literary Society connected with the congregation. But the smallness of the audience had apparently no effect upon the lecturer. He handled his theme *con amore*. In lucid and convincing style, with an abandon that was refreshing to witness, he dealt with the outstanding features of the great Essayist's career. None present could fail to be impressed by his grip of the subject in hand or be in doubt of his meaning, for on this and all such public occasions he wielded "the power that flows from the correspondence of word with thought."

But it was in the Professor's chair that Dr. Denney was seen at his greatest and best. Here he proved himself to be one of the foremost champions of the most central doctrines of our Faith—the Divinity and the Atoning Sacrifice of our Blessed Lord. For three years he taught the class of Systematic Theology in his College, but in 1900, as a consequence of the union of the Free Church of Scotland with the United Presbyterian Church, he was transferred to the Chair of New Testament Language, Literature and Theology, thus succeeding the late Professor A. B. Bruce,

his immediate predecessor in the pastorate at Broughty Ferry. It has been pointed out that as his philosophical equipment made him a fitting successor to Candlish, so his classical attainments designated him, in the year of the Union of the Churches, as worthy to carry on the work of Bruce in the Chair of New Testament Language and Literature.

His colleague, Professor Clow, writes: "For this Chair of New Testament Exegesis he was uniquely prepared. Wide as was the range of his reading in all literature, as his apt quotations from many languages gave evidence, and thorough as was his mastery of the whole round of theological scholarship, he was essentially a man of one book. That book was the New Testament. Its history, its sources, its authors, and especially the Gospel writers, and Paul as their interpreter, called forth from him all his powers, with a deep joy in their exercise. To state the problem of a great passage, to trace and lay bare the writer's thought, to expound the doctrines and apply the message to the lives of men, was a visible delight to him, as it was a devout fascination to his students. The proposal made later, by those who did not know him well, to transfer him back to the Chair of Systematic Theology, because of his out-

standing competence, evoked from him a keen protest. He lived in and loved the world and personalities disclosed by the New Testament of Jesus Christ, his Redeemer." This is a just estimate. Denney's interests gathered especially round the Atonement of his Lord and Master. In the class room he ever emphatically declared "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The doctrine of the Atonement was central to his system.

What many thinkers reckon to be his greatest work, bears the suggestive title *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*. He proposed that subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith should be abandoned in favour of a Scriptural Confession, such as "I believe in God, through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and Saviour." This statement of Dr. Denney, profound yet simple, has been more quoted than any other of his. It is symbolic of the Church's unity of faith. It has even now accomplished more than perhaps he knew, in quickening a general desire for a modification of the Church's Standard into a formula at once vital, essential, unspeculative, and religious. From the sympathetic reception rendered by Churchmen generally to Dr. Denney's plea for a simple undogmatic creed for Scotland, is it too much to hope that

the project may some day soon materialize? More of our young men of fine intellect might be led to embrace the Christian ministry as a calling were the case for the creed thus simplified. The students who came under Professor Denney's teaching must have realized a discrepancy between the Church's practice and profession on this vital question.

Recalling impressions of the professor's pregnant teaching on the doctrine of the Atonement, the Rev. Robert McKinlay, M.A., writes: "One thinks of him pre-eminently as the great exponent of the Cross. Many of his comments on the subject are simply unforgettable."<sup>1</sup> He was speaking once of the tendency of some Protestants to minimize the Cross. 'If I had the choice,' said he, 'between being such an one and a Roman Catholic priest, I had rather be the priest lifting up the Cross to a dying man, and saying, "*God loved like that!*"' It was said with such a quiet intensity that it burned itself upon the mind ineffaceably.

"Again he was speaking of the Mass and the Roman Catholic accretions to the Cross. He maintained that even in the Mass human souls found the virtue of the Cross. Then he added, 'Gentlemen, the Cross is such a thing that even when you bury it, you bury it

ALIVE.' The very ground seemed to open at our feet, and a flaming Cross came up and stood over us, and we were overawed and thrilled, and said, in heart if not in speech, 'How dreadful is this place. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

"After they had left the College Dr. Denney was most generous in helping his students and preaching for them. It was a great occasion when he came down and stayed at the Manse. The present writer had the privilege of listening to two sermons, one glorious Sabbath day. The style was the style of absolute simplicity, but wonderfully moving and penetrating. He could, as few men can, dredge the silt of the soul, and probe its depths. When he spoke of Jesus receiving sinners, I remember still the suppressed passion twitching the muscles of the lips, and moving in the face, and revealing itself in a sentence which was almost explosive and shattering in its stark but living simplicity and reality.

"Whatever the future may bring with regard to his theological impression of the Cross, it will find few greater lovers of the Cross than Dr. James Denney. Whatever fuller knowledge modern psychology may give us of the

problems associated with the person of the Messiah, it will not give us a man who was more passionately devoted to Jesus Christ, one whose whole nature in fuller measure thrilled to the mention of the name of Jesus, the Friend of publicans and sinners.

“Of the Christ of the Cross, Dora Greenwell has said :—

“His feet have tracked the crimson stains  
That lead up from the halls of dread.

“These words might now be applied to this great servant of Jesus Christ. No doubt he has come into the true secret of that Cross, where there is no longer Calvinist or Arminian, Protestant or Papist, Churchman or Dissenter. The Cross is such a tree that it grows and overshadows, and brings all under its wide and benevolent embrace.”

Thus Dr. Denney's own thought ever centred in the New Testament, and from that position he was not to be moved. “The New Testament is not simply a document to be examined under the microscope of the scholar; it is the record of an abounding life, which in a hundred varying accents of love and gratitude bears tribute to the Christ who redeemed it and reconciled it to God.” It was his standard for judging all systems of theological thinking. The system is right if it has the spirit of the

New Testament pervading it ; wrong if it is alien thereto. Impressively he would urge upon the men of the College the not-to-be-disputed value and authority of its teaching. This essentially. On other questions he might be broad-minded, and be willing to travel far in the company of scholars and critics with many of whose views he sympathized. But he had the faculty of caution, and the men were certain that their teacher had not reached his advanced position without deep and anxious study or the assurance that he was right. For convinced he was on every subject that he spoke on, and he invariably carried conviction with him. He never was afraid to cross swords with any theologian if he considered him to be on wrong lines. Ritschl occasionally came in for some heavy castigation, and yet, like most present-day religious thinkers, he himself was much influenced by Ritschlianism. What was good in a man's thinking, his mind readily assimilated ; it as readily tossed off all that was unworthy or seemed to be so. Dealing with dogma as he did, the dogmatic temper occasionally made him appear to his students to be somewhat " narrow " ; they perhaps could not help thinking he was so at times. His absolute justice, fearless courage, and keen penetration



of all sham and pretence made him the "living conscience" to the College. Even more prominent than his teaching was the high standard of duty and responsibility he set up for those who would be ministers of Jesus Christ. Being dead he yet speaketh, and the candour, sympathy and earnestness imparted to his student auditors will continue to tell powerfully upon the Church for many years to come.

The much-lamented demise, in 1914, of the Rev. Principal Thomas M. Lindsay, D.D., LL.D., who for forty years was identified with the Glasgow College, led to the appointment of Dr. Denney as his natural successor in the Principalship. He was himself a product of the College, the first student from among its *alumni* to be appointed a Professor within its walls. The institution was proud of the fact that it had trained a man of such outstanding scholarship, and above all of devout faith and of such absolute and adoring devotion to his Lord. When the General Assembly met in 1915, it was found that there had been a most remarkable consensus of opinion throughout the Church as to this appointment. The name of Professor Denney was the only one sent up by the Presbyteries. When the venerable Dr. George Reith rose to nominate

him, he felt he had an easy task. In a hearty and eulogistic speech, he briefly portrayed the prominent characteristics of his nominee, and remarked that Dr. Denney had not only broken the record by being the first Professor who had come out of the Glasgow College, but once again the record was about to be broken by their appointment of him to the Principalship. The nomination was seconded by Sir David Paulin, and there followed one of those remarkable demonstrations which ever live in the memory of all who are privileged to take part in them. The proposal was received with acclaim, and the whole Assembly rose to its feet whilst the newly-elected Principal was introduced to the house, escorted by his proposer and seconder. It was a magnificent and moving spectacle that was only intensified by the humble bearing of the man on whom was conferred this spontaneous tribute. In a few brief sentences he indicated his willingness to accept the appointment, an intimation that was received with loud and prolonged applause on the part of the Assembly. Thus he took the highest honours with his accustomed simplicity and modesty, and made at the time, in reply to a message of congratulation, the characteristic remark, "The chief joy of such things is the demonstration they give of the

amount of goodwill there is in the world." It was in such serene temper that the late revered Principal Rainy was accustomed to take the manifestations of generosity and distinction that fell to his lot.

The present writer happened to return to Glasgow from the Assembly on its closing night in the same railway compartment as Dr. Denney. Being there for the day in his official capacity as chairman of the Congregational Union of Scotland and as guest of the Moderator he had received much kindness and hospitality at the hands of United Free Churchmen, and especially from Professor McEwen, whose Moderator's breakfasts constituted the early diurnal round. We had just listened to the closing address of the Moderator—who, alas ! in such a brief space of time was to be called away—the echoes of

"Pray that Jerusalem may have  
Peace and felicity,"

were still ringing in our hearts, and the homeward way was taken, brightened by lively conversation. In the carriage, Principal Denney, with his honours fresh upon him, sat immediately opposite to the writer, and one could not fail to notice the placid look on the fine countenance. But he seemed to prefer to listen to the talk of others, rather than be communicative himself. The hour of the railway journey

quickly passed, but the touch of humanity came out at its close, when, as hurried farewells were being said at Queen Street, Denney insisted on one of his old students, who was of the company, sharing his taxi-cab, their journey westward lying in the same direction. A small matter, one might say ! But it showed the man.

The Principalship was the crowning honour of Denney's career. It came to him within two years of his lamented demise, but it left unspoiled his noble simplicity of nature. No man held in slighter regard the avidity for place and power so manifest in these days, or gauged more accurately the value of the mere externalities of life. And no man cared more for the realities. Natural and unaffected he pursued his way, undertaking and fulfilling great tasks, and small, as occasion called ; never found wanting in loyalty to his Church, in fidelity to principle, in devotion to his Saviour and Master. Such things, I repeat, make known to us the man. They were touches of beauty in the high calling of his earthly ministry ; they have added lustre to his memory now that he has gone from us to the higher service.

“ He had ten talents and he used them all,  
 Courage to face and fight his Captain's foes ;  
 Patience to wait for dawn at eventide,  
 Strength to endure the conflict to life's close.

Vision to scan the grand Invisible,  
A heart in tune with the Eternal plan,  
A soaring soul, a steadfast, eager will,  
To right the wrongs of every fellow-man.

Passion for toil, for truth, for native beauty,  
He showed what all our mortal hours may be,  
A walk with God, in joy-transfigured duty,  
Beneath Love's waving flag of Liberty.

Lord help us now, Thy poor one-talent men,  
Bravely to spend their *one* as he spent ten ! ”



*The  
Author*





## CHAPTER VI

### THE AUTHOR

FROM what has been written, it is evident that in his own department of theology James Denney was *facile princeps*. In the sphere of New Testament studies he found his life-work, and gained an influence and authority acknowledged far beyond the bounds of his own Church or land. He was said to know thoroughly seven different languages. The classical and literary scholarship which he brought to bear upon his sacred studies was in the highest degree technically complete. It was noteworthy that he could quote the New Testament with as much ease in the original as in English. He had won his way into, and dwelt continuously in, the passion of the great experience that beats behind it. He exulted in its freedom. Not only an intense desire for exact scholarship, but a determination to reach the very heart of Gospel word or incident, was characteristic of the man. His fine appreciation of the exact value of the Greek and English tongues brought

Denney to the level of the great expository writers like Westcott, Alford, Lightfoot and others.

In the fifth year of his ministry at Broughty Ferry he made his first big venture in publishing. It took the form of a volume on the Epistles to the Thessalonians. This and a companion volume, on the second Epistle to the Corinthians, issued a little later, comprised much of his expository pulpit teaching. Not only fine scholarship but spiritual passion characterize these works, which were given to the public by their author at the request of Sir William Robertson Nicoll. Dr. Marcus Dods, that noted and scholarly exegete, had written the companion volume of this series on *First Corinthians*, and Denney's work had necessarily to bear comparison with that of Dr. Dods. The younger man's production stood the test. It showed him at once to be the competent linguist, the capable expositor, and the reliable historian. *Thessalonians* consists of expositions preached regularly from week to week, bearing the stamp of the preacher's intense individuality, but omitting the critical element of divergent interpretations. *Second Corinthians* reveals his true exegetical power. In the introduction, he argues ably and conclusively for the

immediate dependence of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians on the First. Then the exposition is entered upon, after the manner that has always been familiar in the Scottish Church, under the special title of "lecturing." One of the most appreciated features of this volume is the emphasis laid upon the circumstances which called the letter forth, and of the people to whom it was written, till we actually seem to know them, and live among them.

It was the intrinsic merit of these two volumes that secured the attention of the senators of Glasgow University, who gave Denney at the early age of 39 their honorary Doctorate of Divinity. Then the young author's power began to win for him a more than national reputation. His volume found a ready public, especially in America, and resulted, as already indicated, in an invitation to the author, in the early part of 1894, to deliver a course of lectures to the *alumni* of Chicago University. The lectures attracted crowded audiences, and evoked keen discussion. It was the one on Holy Scripture that mainly, perhaps entirely, caused the "fluttering" in the ecclesiastical dovecots. The reason we may never know, for when in the autumn of that year the lectures were published under the title of *Studies in*

*Theology*, it was found that this particular lecture had been written over again by the author, who had now made it the only one in the volume that is difficult to read. The others constitute most profitable reading, as if Denney had made his own the art of making systematic theology human.

In his *Life of Gladstone*, Mr. Morley tells how the excitement of his *viva voce* examination for the degree culminated when the examiner, after satisfying himself about Gladstone's mastery of some point in theology, said, "We will now leave that part of the subject"; and the candidate, carried away by his interest in the subject answered, "No, sir; if you please, we will not leave it yet."

This keen intellectual interest in theology characterized Dr. Denney to the last working day of his life. "We will not leave it yet." It was no quaint, old-world fancy that made theology the "queen of the sciences" to him. Her royal title could not be disputed. After natural science had explored the physical universe, and psychology had disentangled the working of the mind, and metaphysics had investigated the first principles of Nature and thought, theology was necessary to give man his ultimate conception of the universe. As all roads led to Rome, so all true knowledge,

in Dr. Denney's view, leads to God, in and through whom positive science becomes intelligible.

Hence at theology he worked with all the ardour of an explorer. Had he lived to be a hundred years of age he could never have become a "fossil." What he gave to his students and readers was his latest thought at the time, but they had no guarantee that his position would be exactly the same a year hence. True to the evangelical faith, convinced and strong in his assertion of the deity of our Lord and the reality and efficacy of the Atonement, he was not the man to be content with a traditional statement of these doctrines. His keen, restless mind was constantly searching into the deep things of God, and he who could not always satisfy himself with his theories was the last man to ask others to accept them as final. "We will not leave it yet," he seemed to say, especially to the men whom he trained for the ministry, but also to all readers of his books.

It is certainly no suggestion of any "New Theology" in these *Studies* that fascinates the reader, nor any expectation of novelty to come. The salient chapters of the book deal with the doctrine of the Atonement. There is undoubtedly a candid acceptance

of modern criticism but this is conjoined with absolute loyalty to the central doctrines of the faith "once for all delivered to the saints." The meaning of the Cross is the same as Denney learnt it at his mother's knee. Like others he had travelled far since then, but fetching his circle, while making sure of his centre first, he had now returned, and whatever *Sturm und Drang*, or *Wanderjahre*, he may have experienced, of these there is here no sign. This is seen to be the merit—shall we say the miracle?—of the book. And yet in circles on both sides of the Atlantic our author caused some soreness to too sensitive orthodoxy. The *Studies* constituted an essentially conservative volume, in many of its chapters pleasing even the ultra-orthodox section of his own Free Church, but not all. Of course, by this time the days of heresy hunts had well-nigh spent themselves in that communion, and only murmurs of dissent were manifest when Denney was proposed as Professor in the Glasgow College. For years afterwards, however, references to his attitude towards the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church were common, and once, at all events, called forth an important pronouncement from himself. It happened in this way :

An interesting discussion took place in December, 1904, at the monthly meeting of the Glasgow United Free Church Presbytery (the union between the Free and United Presbyterian Churches having been consummated in 1900), when the Rev. John Buchan moved—"That in view of the attacks now being made on our creed, this Presbytery overture the General Assembly to re-affirm the Church's belief in the infallibility of Holy Scripture and the doctrines of the Confession as hitherto received among us." In doing so, he said it was from no factious spirit that he had tabled this motion that the Assembly should be overtured as re-affirming the doctrine of the Church. It was solely because he had among his people some who were very seriously disturbed in this connection. He thereafter referred to a case of difficulty in his own congregation. One of his workers was in trouble in regard to leaving the Church, and, on being reasoned with, said, "How can you expect me to remain in the Church when one of its accredited teachers denies the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm?" At the end of a somewhat lengthy address, Mr. Buchan said that since he had given notice of his motion the Convocation had met, and his object had been gained much more quickly than by waiting

for the Assembly. He therefore begged to withdraw his motion

Professor Denney, after some discussion, was allowed to make a statement. He said that he was the teacher referred to in connection with the authorship of the 110th Psalm. He asserted that Christ did not teach anything about the authorship of the psalm. He spoke of the authorship of the psalm as every one else in His time would have spoken. He taught that He was what He was, that He was the Christ, not in virtue of a particular relationship to David, but in virtue of a particular relationship to God. That was what Christ was teaching. Professor Denney, continuing, said that for his own part he was convinced that the psalm did not belong to the age of David, for the reasons that would convince him of any other question of the same kind, and that conviction did not touch in the least his assurance of the unique relationship between Christ and the Father. If the motion had been pressed he frankly confessed he would have moved a direct negative, on the ground that to ask the General Assembly to affirm the doctrine of the Church would be to ask the Assembly to affirm something that people who read those words would not take in the same sense. There were people to whom



infallibility of Holy Scripture meant that we had the authority of Jesus for ascribing the 110th Psalm to David.

The Rev. Dr. W. Ross Taylor, at this stage, said that he did not think they should enter into a general discussion, and after some remarks from other speakers in the same direction, Professor Denney said he would just state that it was quite possible for him to profess his faith in the infallibility of Scripture. He believed if a man committed his mind and heart humbly and sincerely to the teaching and guidance of the Holy Scripture, it would bring him right with God and give him a knowledge of God and of eternal life. But literal accuracy and inerrancy were totally different things; and they did not believe in that at all. It was no use employing a form of words that would mislead people into thinking they did believe it. They believed in the Bible as something that if they committed themselves to, it would infallibly bring them to the knowledge of God and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Thus Denney proved himself a sane and open-minded champion of essential orthodoxy and held that it could be commended to the reasonable modern mind. He was a keen critic of the Ritschlian "value judgments"

theory in which the criterion of any doctrine was not so much "Is it true?" as "Is it useful?" He was evangelical to the core, and fervently evangelistic in his insistence on the necessity of power rather than eloquence and smartness in preaching or teaching. As a theologian his mental poise and tolerance towards schools of thought from which he differed radically, made him, it is true, suspect to certain ultra-orthodox evangelicals. He hated, with a perfect hatred, surface generalizations and rule-of-thumb methods of avoiding patient working to established conclusions. He wanted to be sure that he knew what he knew—most of all to be sure of Christ. Ever making Him the centre of the circle of his thought, he argued for a serious doctrine of the person of Christ, that could be reconciled with the phenomena of personal and collective Christian experience. He was no mere mental gladiator, as his friend the enemy at times suggested. His supreme desire always, was not to win controversial victories, but to confirm the faith of men in the impregnable Rock, Christ Jesus. Less and less did he put his trust in credal and confessional attempts, whether of Nicæa or Westminster, to limit Christ to the mental outlook of a school or an age. Hence his proposal, embodied in

the concluding section of his book *Christ and the Gospel*, that creed subscription should be abandoned in favour of a comprehensive and Scriptural confession of faith, which should bind the members of the Church to the Christian attitude to Christ, and to nothing else. He recognized that it was neither wholesome nor Christian for men to teach doctrines in defiance of a formulated creed to which they had adhibited their signature, and which no longer expressed their living faith. Even Declaratory Acts did not give the necessary relief. We search in vain through the Gospels for any creed that our Lord imposed. The Church should either re-write her creed or give us a simpler one expressed in terms which cease to irritate and to which a man can honestly affirm.

Surely it is not beyond the wit or province of a General Assembly, met in solemn conclave, to approve some such creed as Denney suggested, enabling those who desire to avail themselves of the provision to have the right to substitute it for the old. There should be no question of the "dead hand" of the 17th century theologian holding it back.

According to our modern thought, no one has the right to fetter property for all time

—far less the human mind; and the owner of the “dead hand,” if he were here to-day, would probably be a convert to liberal opinion!

The Church will speak with the note of authority, and command the respect of a democratic age only, when she stands before men spiritually free. Her ministers will not win attention from the coming generation unless they are delivered from every suspicion of unworthy motive of reserve. The Church must believe in the presence of the Spirit of Christ—which is the spirit of truth—in the world to-day and in the future as in the past.

Dr. Denney's proposal that creed subscription should be abandoned in favour of a comprehensive and Scriptural confession of faith, which, as he suggested might be “I believe in God through Jesus Christ, His only Son our Saviour,” was based on the view that a man's or a Church's Christology was a thing apart from a vital personal faith, and if the faith were real the theological interpretation of it might be infinitely variable. That there was a good deal of ultra-orthodox discussion, and criticism of his personal confession of faith, as contained in the final sentences of his book *Christ and the Gospel*, goes without saying. His words are: “What Christ claims

and what is His due is a place in the faith of men. . . . To be true Christians we are thus bound to Him; but we are not bound to any one else. . . We are not bound to any man's or to any Church's rendering of what He is or has done. We are not bound to any Christology or to any doctrine of the work of Christ."

What above all things Denney sought for, was a doctrine that would *preach*. "The evangelist," he remarks suggestively, "is in the last resort the judge of evangelical theology. If it does not serve his purpose it is not true." Hence he envied, as he would assert on occasion, the Roman Catholic priest, who can preach with the crucifix in his hand.

The Rev. Professor George Jackson, B.A., of Didsbury College, Manchester, writes:—

"Denney's great work has been done as a Christian theologian, and as an interpreter of Christian truth in terms of the modern mind. Speaking for myself, I do not know any man of his generation who has done so much for the revitalizing of evangelical theology and, if I may so say, for making it 'preachable.' Very much that has gone by the name of theology in the past had been merely a matter of words and names, of definitions and proof texts—a jacket of sun-dried pellets which its

'students' could find no use for when they stood up in the presence of living men and women. But, as Denney himself once told me, he did not take the smallest interest in a theology which could not be preached.

"Nature and grace had joined hands to make of Dr. Denney an almost ideal teacher of the religious teachers of this generation. He had, to begin with, the glow and passion of the true evangelist. He held that the first, if often forgotten, duty of the Church is to evangelize, and that to that end all its best energies must be bent. I shall never forget how he emptied all the vials of his scorn on the head of some unlucky minister who had excused himself for giving what he called 'a simple evangelical address' because he had not had time to prepare a proper sermon. As if, said Denney, there was any task that could so tax the strength of the Christian preacher as to preach the love of God, and so to preach it that men should commit themselves to it. . . .

"To all his great gifts of mind and heart was added a gift of style rare in writers of any kind, but especially rare in the realm of theology. Perhaps it is only a man who was brought up on the dull and stodgy theological handbooks of a generation ago who can appreciate to the full the clear, incisive, trenchant pages.

of Denney's *Studies* in the same subject. After reading them one is tempted to wish that it were a law of the Church that no man should be suffered to teach theology who had not first given evidence of his power to write lucid and idiomatic English."

To many, Denney's two volumes, *The Death of Christ: its place and interpretation in the New Testament*, and *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, have proved the most valuable of modern books on a central theme, because written in such close agreement with the New Testament. He is the outstanding modern author, who has accomplished more than almost any other in bringing this generation back to the rational view of the Atonement. His significant saying that not Bethlehem, but Calvary, is the centre of gravity in the New Testament is worthy of emphasis. While some critics have not unnaturally felt that these works set forth the Atonement as consisting of the *death* of Christ, rather than in the death of *Christ*, yet one feels in reading them that they have been written, so to speak, with his life's blood.

He could say with Frederick W. Robertson of Brighton, "We have deliberately chosen the Cross for our portion, and it is no marvel if some of its blood is sprinkled on us.

The Cross is dear, come how or when it will."

Denney was sure of his ground. He was ever the Christ-intoxicated man, and what he wrote or told out with unequalled passion was this, that in the Cross, we see Jesus Christ in his sinlessness, dying the death of the sinful. There is the majesty and wonder of the Divine grace at man's disposal in the great Sacrificial Life. "All that sin meant for us—all that in sin and through it had become ours—God made His, and He made His own in death . . . God's righteousness is demonstrated at the Cross, because there, in Christ's death, it is made once for all apparent that He does not palter with sin; the doom of sin falls by His appointment on the Redeemer. And it is possible, at the same time, to accept as righteous those who by faith unite themselves to Christ upon the Cross, and identify themselves with Him in His death; for in doing so they submit in Him to the Divine sentence upon sin, and at bottom become right with God." Both in his writing and preaching, Dr. Denney continually emphasized the truth that at Calvary there was judgment of sin, as well as revelation of Divine love. A thought to which he delighted to give expression was this, that while some



say, God is love, therefore He requires no Atonement, the New Testament says, God is love, therefore He provides the Atonement. Only in this way is there found a Divine righteousness which "puts the ungodly in the right."

Thus Calvary was ever the central point in Denney's theology. Like the great apostle of the Gentiles, his motto was, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He derived inspiration from the sublime conception of Christ on the Cross, and in thoughts that breathed and words that burned, he poured out for the benefit of his fellows the convictions it quickened in his mind. One of his latest written statements was one of his most suggestive in this respect: "The apostles did not imagine the atoning power of the death of Jesus—it is too great for imagination. They did not invent it to cloak the offence of the Cross; it is too great to be a theological contrivance. No, but a new truth rose on their horizon as they looked on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus—the truth of truths, beyond all telling wonderful—that sin-bearing love is the supreme and final reality of the universe, and that here it is incarnate once for all. From Christ on His Cross, a goodness

put forth its hand and touched them, which outweighed all the sin of the world, and made it impotent ; henceforth they believed in God *through Him.*" True words, grand words, worthy to be written in letters of gold !

*In Gospel Questions and Answers* we have an admirable example of Denney's method as a preacher, at once scholarly and devout. Here we get an idea of how supreme was his faculty for making the New Testament intelligible as the record and deposit of an overwhelming experience of redemption, and for generating the conviction in the reader's mind that the Gospel incarnate in Jesus is the only thing that matters in the world.

A most weighty volume by Dr. Denney is *Jesus and the Gospel; a study of Christianity in the Mind of Christ*. The reasoning here, in spite of certain critical concessions—which some good people regretted, but which were doubtless indications of the author's frankness, and of his spirit of fearlessness—is masterly and convincing. It was the very strength with which Denney held fast to the things at the centre that freed him from all anxiety as to what was happening along the circumference. Every argument he uses in the book is charged with an extraordinary intenseness

of religious feeling, which acts with a kind of compelling power upon the reader.

Other writings of Denney include a volume of sermons entitled *Eternal Life*, the last work published in his lifetime, and dealing with problems arising out of the great European War. All of these works passed into several editions. The question has been asked, why was it that a book by James Denney should command so large a constituency in all parts of Christendom, waiting to receive it? The answer is that no one can handle and ponder treatises of his without knowing that they contain nothing cheap, nothing mean, nothing wrought without toil of heart and brain, nothing unworthy of the great scholars and divines of his own native land in whose succession he stands.

Referring to Dr. Denney's "precious commentary" on the *Epistle to the Romans*, a contribution to the second volume of the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, Sir W. Robertson Nicoll describes it as "perhaps the very best piece of work he has ever accomplished." "We have," he says, "a certain mournful pride in thinking that we did something to induce him to come forward as an author. At that time he had made up his mind. He was to preach the Cross of CHRIST—on the

one hand its power to save, and on the other its sharpness and sternness, its imperious calls to duty and self-denial. From this preaching of the Cross he was never moved, but as time went on, he became more and more master of a style which did justice to the great thought. It was his deep conviction that want of style prevented almost all Scottish theological books from reaching the first rank. Indeed he held that MacLeod Campbell's treatise on the Atonement was the only classical theological book that came from Scotland. Like Dale he drilled himself in Burke."

There was much in Denney that recalled Dale, and the older man recognized with joy a true fellow soldier. It cannot be said that Dr. Denney rose into poetry, or that his imagination was highly developed. There was, however, a deep evangelical tone in his writings. He learned to write with self-command, a majestic sense of simplicity and precision, a resolute limitation of general statement by the severity of facts. This serious clearness, this grasp of his own thoughts, is perhaps most plainly seen in his chief book, *Jesus and the Gospel*. What was said of a great preacher may be said about Denney. "His inmost spirit had been busy with the New Testament. He preached New Testament doctrines as one

who lived in the presence of great subjects, subduing him, restraining him, calling for self-recollection, and sober words. By dint of constant labour, he arrived at a style which was the perfection of lucidity."

It is a matter of deep satisfaction that the *Cunningham Lectures on the Theology of Paul*—on which Dr. Denney was engaged when his illness came upon him—were in such a forward condition as to ensure publication shortly after his death. Here we have an important presentation of the great fact of Christian thought and experience with which it deals. In this posthumous work there comes into play, the writer's qualities of clear and careful thinking, critical judgment and devotion to the evangelical faith, which had already gained for him distinction as an expounder of Christian doctrine. Starting out historically, the author indicates the consciousness of tension that has always existed between man and his environment, and that the opportunity of Christian thinkers has been to explain that tension and to prove that in the Gospel there is a power which can remove and transcend it. In working out his theme, he emphasizes the need for the death of Christ, whilst giving place to the importance of Christ's example and the redemptive power of the

perfect life, and finds in the cross the most signal instance of God's reaction against sin. The end of reconciliation is the acceptance of the mind of God with regard to sin, of love as the law of life and the exercise of reconciling power in human existence.

The volume as a whole will match with the other works that Dr. Denney has left behind him. It is a fine testimony to his industry, piety and consecrated scholarship. The lectures deal with the Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation. The contents comprise : The Experimental Basis of the Doctrine ; Reconciliation in the Christian Thought of the Past ; The New Testament Doctrine of Reconciliation ; The Need of Reconciliation ; Reconciliation as achieved by Christ ; Reconciliation as realized in Human Life. The Rev. Principal Alexander Whyte, D.D., LL.D., says : " I do not know any modern book that has so much preaching power in it as this book has. And no old book, however true and powerful, will speak to preacher and hearer in our days as Dr. Denney's ' Reconciliation ' will speak." Here it may suffice to say the author does himself justice again, in the domain of Dogmatic, as he had already proved his supreme merit in his chosen field of New Testament Theology.

Although some may reckon his published

contributions to Systematic Theology somewhat meagre, it should be remembered that, especially towards the close of his career, Dr. Denney furnished many such doctrinal articles to Religious Encyclopædias and the high-class Theological and Religious magazines of the day. A memorable series of papers, for example, appeared on the Theology of the Epistle to the Romans in the *Expositor* for 1901, while for a consummately able study in Biblical Theology the reader's attention is directed to the article "Holy Spirit," in Hastings' well-known *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*.

Denney had already received the degree of D.D. from Glasgow University, his Alma Mater; little wonder that from other quarters also, his great abilities as a theologian should receive full recognition. Princeton and Aberdeen Universities likewise conferred their doctorate upon him. It is recalled with what extreme gratification Denney regarded his selection for the degree by the Northern Scottish University in the year of the celebration of its 450th anniversary. At the great Strathcona banquet on that occasion, Marconi of wireless fame was unable to be present, and it was Dr. Denney who was called upon to fill the seat of the clever inventor.

Many contributions to general literature

as well as theology came from his gifted pen. His knowledge of English literature was, to say the least, uncommon, almost uncanny, in its exactness. Towards the close of his career he remarked to a familiar friend that if Shakespeare's tragedies were lost, he could replace them from memory ! With the literary productions of the eighteenth century particularly he had a most intimate acquaintance. That was one of the delights of being in Denney's company of an evening. For a staid theologian he had a catholic taste in literature, and while toying with a lighted cigarette—doing penance thereby that he might become all things to all men—he would surprise his friends with interests and sympathies in that direction which the mere scholar or divine would never have suspected. Thus, he would dilate on the pleasure he had experienced in dipping into St. Bernard, and contrariwise how much he had been disappointed in Aquinas and the Puritans. The classics were ever his delight to talk about, and yet when in his last illness, he wanted some light literature to ease his mind in the tedium of the sick-room, he found the relief in "Q's" fiction which especially caught his fancy, in such works as *Troy Town*, *The Delectable Duchy*, and others of a like kind. In fiction,



however, Dickens was ever first favourite with him.

In January of the year in which he passed away, he contributed to the *Glasgow Herald*, on editorial suggestion, a brilliant article for the poet's anniversary day, entitled "Burns and Present Distress." Denney was an authority on Burns, as on some other poets, and had lectured on the subject. But in the production in question he took a fresh survey. It was very opportune. After indicating that the Great War had brought into relief many aspects hitherto unnoticed, of almost everything, and might perhaps even give a fresh turn to the speeches at Burns clubs, he went on to indicate that this poet's sense was an even more wonderful thing than his genius, indicating as it did a finality both of insight and expression. A more sensitive man, indeed, never lived nor spoke. But as the strongest sense may at times be deflected or tainted, so it was with Burns.

"A poet is the natural representative of the natural man, and has an instinctive delight in the natural virtues. He likes the goodness which is untaught, spontaneous, generous, independent of reflection and comparison. He suspects the goodness which is self-conscious, which knows that it is not conforming to

widely accepted standards, but deliberately protesting against them. This non-conforming conscience is his *bête noire*, and he assails it with all the resources of his genius. As it readily lapses into Pharisaism, his task is not difficult. If he is magnificently superior to it, as Shakespeare was, he may mock it with genial humour, and never do goodness any harm. 'Because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?' But if he is not so magnificently superior—if the non-conforming conscience of his society is powerful enough to insult him—still more, if it is powerful enough to reach his own conscience and to convince him of real faults—then the humour, if the poet can still command it, is apt to be savage rather than genial, and the good sense loses its balance.

"This explains a good deal in Burns. It was unfortunate for him that in indulging his satirical sense, he got into false relations with himself and with a higher law than that of ecclesiastical courts or social conventions. He cultivated a kind of moral bravado which is just as much hypocrisy as the hypocrisy of Holy Willie, and not less prejudicial to genuine goodness. 'You know,' he wrote to a friend, 'that I can sin, but dare not lie.' But when a man's sins are open beforehand,

when he flaunts them in everybody's face with conscious defiance, it is snatching a reputation for virtue very cheap to say that he dare not lie about them. To lie about them, to pretend that they are not there, is the one thing which he has put out of his power. It is the melancholy fact that Burns practised this miserable moral attitudinizing all his life. He did it about drinking, and he did it about his unspeakable relations to women. He sometimes exhibits the painful spectacle of the Pharisaism of profligacy—the prodigal son, not penitent, but swaggering round the farm with a great spread of moral shirt-front, as though he were setting an example to his cold-blooded brother. Of course this was not how he thought of himself in his heart of hearts; in the most moving poem of his first volume, the 'Bard's Epitaph'—a history, as Wordsworth calls it, in the shape of a prophecy—he completely drops the bravo and speaks the final humble truth. Nobody who reads it will judge him. But the bravado had been there, and its effects both on himself and others were deplorable."

Then turning by antithesis to Shakespeare, of whom Denney was a kind of hero-worshipper, ever regarding him as a great spiritual gift to the world, and quoting Sir Walter Raleigh's

estimate of him as "the creed of England" (more, of course, in regard to the spirit of his teaching than in mere verbal similarities) he described this as a felicitous thought, and true even when it is tested in detail.

#### SHAKESPEARE THE CREED OF ENGLAND.

"There is a long gallery of drinkers in Shakespeare, every one drawn to the life ; people like Stephano, Sir Toby, Pistol, Cassio, 'the third part of the world,' Lepidus, and many more. There is no savour of Puritanism in the way in which they are depicted, yet no one could say the impression they make on the mind is other than morally wholesome. They express the creed of England about drinking, and it is a sound and manly creed. But who would venture to say as much for the representations of drinking in Burns ? Making every allowance for the element of extravagance without which drinking songs could not be written at all, and prizing above all price the humour of the opening stanzas in 'Death and Doctor Hornbook,' and much besides, we must reluctantly admit, that our national poet has provided us with a far less wholesome creed than Shakespeare has made authoritative for our neighbours. And there is no denying

that his practice squared with his creed. He drank to the last. He drank, as he said himself, when with every bout he gave away a slice of his constitution. If repentance could trammel up the consequences of evil we might urge that he repented. But what is his own description of the case—'Whiles, but aye ower late, I think braw sober lessons.'"

And thus Denney pungently applied the principle to the present distress arising from the war:

"One can hardly help wondering to-day, whether in this, Burns is to prefigure the fate of his people. There were two things in which he was always absolutely sincere, and in which he never posed more than pose is inevitable in idealizing. The one was the incomparable value of a pure and happy family life; the other was his love of country. Both are signally illustrated in the 'Cottar's Saturday Night,' which, though both its merits and its popularity are to a large extent conventional, is yet, as Lockhart truly says, that one of all his poems, the exclusion of which from the collection would be most injurious to the character of the man. But his patriotism and his sense for home did not save him from the ignoble elements of his creed, and though they are still powerful among us, it seems

uncertain whether they will save the nation."

Referring to a speech made by a prominent statesman lately in the House of Commons, a deliverance which created a deep impression and in which were rehearsed the "too lates" of a previous Administration, Denney in a concluding paragraph pertinently asks, "Is *he* going to add to the number, the last and most fatal, by deferring the day of reckoning with the power which wrecked the life of Burns, which is ceaselessly wrecking characters and homes, and is capable, if let alone, of wrecking the country?"

It was a powerful plea, and timely as powerful, and, as was to be expected, called forth much public criticism. The *Bulletin*, a Glasgow illustrated daily, came out with a clever cartoon on Burns and Denney, giving a capital likeness of the Principal, and headed, "Wha daur meddle wi' Burns?" while underneath ran the legend, "Principal Denney has been comparing the miserable moral attitudinizing of Burns with the wholesome moral effect of Shakespeare's pictures of drunkards." The accompanying sketch represented Denney affectionately embracing the Bard of Avon on his pedestal, as he exclaims, "Lay the proud usurper low," while, as if the action

suited the word, the bust of Burns lay prone below.

In the foreground an indignant crowd, presumably of Burns' admirers, is prominent, for the most part looking daggers and shaking wrathful fists !

The reference to the foregoing article on the national poet and his influence is historically interesting, from the fact that it was the last that Dr. Denney ever penned. A few days later he contracted what proved to be his fatal illness. He rallied for a time, but he never really recovered. It will not be forgotten that the final public pronouncement of this far-seeing and intrepid Christian statesman and thinker, was a powerful plea for the sobriety, freedom and righteousness of his nation.





*The  
Social  
Reformer*



## CHAPTER VII

### THE SOCIAL REFORMER

IN the later years of his life, particularly, Dr. Denney was called to leadership in great vital causes. He was a man marked out for this. In social questions generally he had taken a deep interest, and on these had spoken with authoritative voice. Party politics he eschewed, although scanning with keen eye the administration of public affairs. With regard to other engrossing questions in which the clergy usually find scope for their activities, he practised a studied reserve, but on the great Temperance question his mind was made up. Doubtless in the later days, as the war weighed heavily upon his heart, and he was more and more convinced of our nation's righteous cause, this one desire became regnant with him—that the nation should be worthy to win the victory. The evil of the drink traffic at such a fateful hour, roused his energies to white heat, and he spoke as with a tongue of fire. When weaker men hung back through indifference or cowardice, in relation to this pressing reform, he pointed the way. Those

impassioned addresses of his on prohibition, will be long remembered by his grateful followers. He became almost at once a temperance stalwart, sound, courageous and able on this question. Although he had long been an advocate of total abstinence, his sympathies for many years were with those who advocated a reformed public-house. He was one of the few outstanding men in Scotland who supported what is called "disinterested management." But circumstances were too strong for Denney. A turn of events—the stress and strain of the war—made him a prohibitionist, and thereafter alike by his rich gifts of voice and pen, he rendered memorable service in bringing home the urgency of this question to the people and the Government of the land. He shared in the general regret that, while the nation was practically united as to the urgent necessity of prohibition as a war-time measure, Parliament had more than once missed an opportunity of putting the luxury of drink—a deadly luxury for so many sorely-tried brothers and sisters of humanity—upon an equality with luxuries which are infinitely less harmful.

It is related of Thomas Clarkson that when he was toiling earnestly for the emancipation of the slaves and for the abolition of the slave

trade, William Wilberforce, a much more apparent and respectable, but possibly a less earnest labourer in the same cause, called upon him one Sabbath morning, and found his table strewn with the everlasting correspondence concerning the emancipation, and Clarkson labouring at it. Wilberforce said to him, "My dear Clarkson, do you ever remember that you have a soul to be saved?" And Clarkson said, "My dear friend, I can remember nothing now but those poor negroes." It certainly was the answer of a thoroughly rapt enthusiast and illuminative of a whole character. So Denney, in all his active propaganda against the drink, was really remembering nothing but the souls held in thrall by drink's power. His hatred of liquordom as a barrier to the extension of the Kingdom of God, sprang from devotion to his Master, and regard for those He came to save. He knew that again and again a measure of prohibition might have been passed, and would have been accepted almost without a murmur. And even when semi-starvation was well within the range of possibility, and drastic curtailments were being made in every direction, there was the spectacle of the liquor trade still ranged among the necessities of the national life. Indeed, right thinking men like

Denney, willing to make the greatest sacrifices themselves, and only asking to be called upon to make them, were staggered and amazed when they saw first one Prime Minister and then another (with a record of splendid work for temperance) virtually acknowledging the right of beer and spirits to a place, however reduced, in the category of national needs. There might be secrets and compacts known only to those in the inner circle of the national administration, but to a man of Denney's calibre the attitude of the Government on this all-important question suggested weakness, amounting to criminal folly, if not indeed to treason. Above all, in the light of Scriptural declarations he had definitely made up his mind on the subject. He recognized the fact that God never upbraided man for attempting too much in the interests of human weal. On the contrary, He approves of the bold daring of men struggling for the right against oppression and wrong, and again and again incites to such action. "Quit yourselves like men, and fight." "Deal courageously and the Lord shall be with you." The energizing power of such appeals roused Denney, as centuries before the lion-like spirit of John Knox had been stirred when, despite the timid counsels of wavering friends and the threats of implacable

foes, he preached that memorable sermon in St. Andrews which finally confirmed the Reformation. We are told "that his audience quailed under his solemn denunciations while he urged on all according to their station to remove the abominations" against which he protested "before the fire of the Divine wrath should descend and consume what man had refused to put away." It was the ennobling appeals of the Almighty which fired the spirits of Reformers and Martyrs in all ages, and which have lit up with imperishable glory the page of Scottish History.

The Rev. William Muir, B.L., B.D., Home Mission Secretary of the United Free Church of Scotland, a worthy fellow-labourer in the Temperance cause, writing with reference to the part Dr. Denney took in connection with the demand for prohibition during the period of the war and demobilization, says, "He was always so far-seeing and fearless, and there was always such an element of finality in all he said, that every utterance of his was a genuine contribution to his theme whatever it was. But in connection with the agitation for prohibition, there was an element of passion in his summons to the nation and his appeal to the Government which gave him an altogether unique place in the crisis. His was

the clarion call to righteousness, and he became a great national leader, with far-reaching influence. His earnestness and moral enthusiasm, his scorn for every subterfuge, and his outlook at once spiritual and imperial, did much to lift the movement above everything which tended to mere partisanship or petty provincialism. Even those who knew him best and to whom in his humility he turned as if they were experts, were amazed not merely at the thoroughness with which he threw himself into the movement, but at the mastery of detail which he showed throughout. It became increasingly manifest that he had not merely the public instinct of the true leader of men, and the insight which enabled him to go straight, to the essential and relevant, but that he had an eye for intricacies of argument and subtleties of motive, which enabled him to meet the enemy at every point with an absolute sureness of touch. The student and recluse proved himself a match for the journalist and the man of the world. He saw both the wood and the trees. He was loyal alike to the universal and the particular. He gave his time and his strength to the conflict so prodigally, that probably he was less fit than he would otherwise have been to fight the disease which laid him low.



He gave himself for sobriety, freedom, and God. It is our unspeakable sorrow that he has passed away before the crowning day; and if that is ever to come, it will only be through those who remain being loyal as he was to duty, and above all to Christ, who gave Himself for us."

Denney had little experience of political propaganda before he threw himself into the movement for prohibition during the war. Consequently when he became sure that the Government was playing fast and loose, he said so. He was delightfully outspoken—this man of pure soul, of clear-eyed vision, and with a burning sense of the wrong done by a traffic from which are derived "great revenues without right." Hence he could not be gainsaid. Some might dislike him for it, they might even denounce *him*, but they could not ignore him. A very plain man, a very straight man, refusing to be mealy-mouthed, in words of judgment, he would arouse others to the seriousness of this burning question of the hour. There was something cosmical about the movements of Denney at this time. He seemed to be allied to the natural powers. He was a force to be reckoned with in public affairs, albeit his method of persuasion with those in the "seats of the

mighty " was no more successful than the ordinary " let's pretend " mode which is more consecrated by political custom. He realized that old Adam is even yet too much for young Melancthon. And still there was the spectacle of a nation practically united as to the urgent needfulness of prohibition as a war-time emergency! Yes, *practically* united, for of course there are exceptions to every rule and principle, like that gentleman whose preoccupation was so intense that, in a convivial company on one occasion, he suddenly burst into weeping, and on being questioned as to the *fons et origo* of his tears, answered in a voice broken by sighs and hiccoughs—" It's the National Debt! They'll never pay it off!" That he himself had done his best was evident, but it was in the thought of how little one man can do as a revenue-producer that his mind sought refuge from the ominous well-being of a too perfect ebriety. He had become a burden-bearer. His case is typical, and it has become more and more so since the days when a man could forget the shabbiness and craziness of his own little waggon, by hitching it to a fiery comet, and let his wife and children go begging, while he sped to the rescue of his country, so " *sair hauden doon* " by financial burdens!

In view of the moral as well as financial questions involved, our responsible legislators ought to have answered the clamant demand for prohibition by a clear statement of their position on the subject, so that the nation might know where it stood. Public life would benefit if more men like James Denney would emerge from their studies and say exactly what they think upon vital questions of the hour. Thus the stress and strain of the war having made him a prohibitionist, as such, both by pen and voice, he rendered distinguished service to the proletariat and to the Government as well. He wrote with discrimination a New Year tract for the Scottish Temperance League, entitled "Where Temperance Work is Wanted," which attained an immense circulation.

In February, 1916, he preached the annual sermon of the League to a large audience in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow. In May he gave a wonderfully telling speech at the joint Temperance meeting of the Churches in the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh, while his article on State Purchase, appearing originally in *The British Weekly*, and which has been circulated by tens of thousands, was epoch-making.

State Purchase, which he defines as necessarily involving State management, would, he argues, tend to the steady multiplication of Government

departments and civil servants, and thus be an undoubted menace to the independence of Parliament and to purity of administration. Again, he declares :—

“The need of the country is urgent and immediate, and any scheme of purchase would be elaborated with difficulty, fiercely contested at every step, and carried—if it were carried at all—after prolonged delay, during which the present fatal evils would continue unchecked. It would put an enormous additional responsibility on the shoulders of a Government which is already weighted far beyond its strength, and needs nothing less than a new field for the display of administrative incapacity. It would insensibly alter public sentiment with regard to the trade, and rehabilitate a business which the common conscience and its own inevitable fruits had at last succeeded in exhibiting in its genuine and baleful character. It would threaten, at least in Scotland, the liberty which Temperance Reformers have secured by fifty years’ persistent toil, and it is difficult to resist the impression that those who refuse to combine it with the 1920 Act are trying to get behind that Act, which was an agreed Act, and to get better terms for the trade than have been already settled for it by the law. But, above all, it is irrelevant—wickedly and

maddeningly irrelevant—to the necessities of the hour.

“State Purchase is being put forward as an alternative to prohibition, but no one knows better than its advocates that it is no alternative. If all licences were in the hands of the State to-morrow, would the consequences of the drink trade be affected in the slightest? Would there be less liquor consumed, and less inefficiency resulting from it? Would there be less waste of food and transport, or less employment of men in an ‘industry’ which only debilitates and impoverishes the nation? Would there be less money wasted in drink and more contributed to the War Loan? There is only one answer to these questions. It does not matter a straw whether the trade is managed by a State Department or by its present owners; as long as the common sale of intoxicating drink is continued, no matter under what auspices, we shall suffer as we are suffering to-day.

“In this matter the Government is on its trial. Long ago Mr. Lloyd George spoke the truth about the third and most dangerous of our enemies—the lure of the drink—and he has never withdrawn what he said. He was not able then to deal with it, but he is able now. A Government which could not deal with it,

instantly, effectively, and for the emergency of the war conclusively, would have no title to exist. It would stand condemned as a Government without moral sense or moral courage, the slave of an interest and an appetite to which the nation was being sacrificed. And it cannot be said too strongly that State purchase does not deal with it at all. Prohibition does, and to offer State purchase as a substitute for prohibition is to insult the common sense of the country, and to outrage the common conscience. If the Government, after all that has happened, refuse prohibition, they are deliberately prolonging the war; they are deliberately nursing inefficiency and waste; they are deliberately working for famine at home and defeat in the field, and deserving it. And if instead of prohibition they offer the illusory and irrelevant measure of State purchase—homeopathy when the one salvation is in surgery—they will be guilty of a betrayal of the vital interest of the nation which, even to Mr. Lloyd George, will never be forgiven."

In his sermon to the Scottish Temperance League on "Insincerity in a Time of National Crisis," Principal Denney was equally emphatic. He declared that the lesson of the text, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm lxvi. 18), was that of sincerity

and consistency in prayer. "If we appealed to God to take our side we must be unreservedly on His side. Otherwise we mocked God, and God is not mocked. The one prayer in which we all united at this moment was the prayer for victory, and it concerned us to know what sincerity here implied. It implied that our interest in victory should not be pitched too low. People who resented the war only because it disturbed a life to which they wanted to return—a life in which God and the soul and the spiritual good of the community had no place, and in which they would still have no place if victory came—could not pray so as to be heard. God was not bringing the nation through this awful experience but for purification and uplifting, and to shirk this was to forfeit the right to pray. The auspices under which they met led them to think of insincerity in relation to the national sin of intemperance and its disabling effects.

"The head of the nation, they gratefully acknowledged, had not been insincere. But the King's example could not move either the House of Commons or the Town Council of Glasgow to equal sincerity, and by their frivolous treatment of a grave responsibility, our representatives had lost their title not only

to be heard by God but to be respected by men. All the truth on this question was obvious, and all the modes of insincerity were transparent. Victory depended on strength, yet we tolerated in all our cities, liquor-sodden slums, in which a pitiful sediment of what should be human life accumulated, in which vitality was low and the death-rate high, and asked victory on these terms. Let us deal sincerely first with the liquor problem and the housing problem: they would never be solved apart."

After pointing out that victory depended on Moral strength, and further upon Industrial strength, the preacher, in measured and impressive accents, continued:

"There was a final insincerity to be guarded against in the use of the phrase 'for the period of the war.' It was properly applied to inconveniences to which we submitted, like the darkening of the streets, but was quite inapplicable to matters of right and wrong. If it was wrong now to make huge profits out of the nation's need, without caring what they cost, it would be wrong after the war. If workshop customs were suspended now, because they had made idleness a fine art, they should be suspended permanently. It was honourable to get all you could for your work, but demoralizing to give the least you could for your wages.



If the prohibition of the common sale of intoxicants was right now, for the reasons indicated, it was always right. And we would not be able to pray for victory without mocking God till we made it our object to clear this evil from the life of the nation, not for the period of the war but for ever."

In view of such strong and incontrovertible evidence, how statesmen should still trifle with a stupendous evil in a fashion which frustrated and forbade prayer, Denney could not understand.

He saw how the Government preached economy night and day, stopped the importation of luxuries, urged the growing of vegetables on unoccupied patches in the Lothians and elsewhere, the rearing of pigs and poultry in the Hebrides—saw, too, how millions of bushels of precious grain go into the breweries and distilleries of the land, and over £200,000,000 of money drain away in intoxicants without the Government thinking it worth while to interfere. In Denney's eyes it would all have been very ludicrous if it had not been tragical. As a nation, he declared, "We opened our veins to bleed ourselves white, and prayed for strength!" And in view of the tragedy, for it still faces us, well might a writer in a contemporary journal put the question to the

British public, " Is there truth in the supposition that the secret party funds, subscribed by the liquor interests, dominate the position—is it graft—hideous graft—that is prolonging the life of this food-destroying monopoly, and that calls the tune the Government shall play ? "

Social Reformers of different shades of political opinion still await a clear answer to a query at once so plain and pertinent.

*The  
Man  
of  
Affairs*



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MAN OF AFFAIRS

THERE was no other man, in his combination of gifts, quite like James Denney in the United Free Church of Scotland. In a Church, happily still affluent in preachers, scholars and theologians, he was *primus inter pares*. In fact, in any assemblage gathered for religious and moral ends, he was generally reckoned the leading spirit. A powerful personality and driving force, a master in the art of clear-cut incisive speech and fearless in his championship of any cause, he was not, in the conventional sense, a Church leader. He had been trained in quite another atmosphere. But he *led* in a far wider sense and wielded a far more powerful influence than those whose *penchant* is the ecclesiastical forum.

It was because of this that the loss to his own Church through his untimely demise created a feeling akin to consternation. For he was not only a deep thinker and accomplished theologian by nature and study, but a great administrator also, and a very straight-

forward and sane diplomat. Thus he had come to impress himself upon the life of the Church as no man had done since "the brave days of old," when Rainy was chief of the clan. There was something of the clannishness of a family in the old Free Church of Scotland, and the cause of it was affection for the chief. Here Denney was successor to Rainy, as Rainy was to Chalmers. Of course, there were marked dissimilarities between the two former. The one had gifts which the other had not. Their environment had been different in the formative period of life, but each was *dux* in the literal sense, in his own sphere. When Rainy passed away, and then Dr. W. Ross Taylor, great ecclesiastics both, it was seen that Denney turned from scholasticism to questions bearing more directly upon the work and welfare of the United Free Church. He had had a share in the negotiations which culminated in the union of Free Church and United Presbyterian Church, in 1900, and in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the war, he gave himself unsparingly to the work of the conference between the members of the Church of Scotland and his own Church, with a view to their ultimate amalgamation. Dr. George Reith, Denney's friend and pastor in his later years, described him as without exaggeration

the hope of the Church. He had done magnificent work for his denomination, but he was, when taken, comparatively speaking, still in the midst of his days. He (Dr. Reith) did not think there was a man in the Church to whom the Church looked rather than to Dr. Denney to guide them in the future, and especially through the complex and intricate questions which would arise in the course of the negotiations on Union. He had heard it said by a minister of the Church of Scotland, "If Dr. Denney advocates Union, there will be union; if Dr. Denney is opposed to Union, there will be none." That might be an exaggeration, but it showed the estimation in which he was held in the sister Church and how widely he was trusted; and also how great was his capacity for impressing his views, and the weight of his personality, on those outside his ecclesiastical communion. The crowning honour of Moderatorship of the General Assembly would assuredly have come to him had he lived. There was keen expectation among his fellow-churchmen that the following Assembly would have seen his appointment to the post of honour, already so worthily won.

As Convener of the Central Fund, his work can only be described as brilliant. Here his great administrative qualities had full play.

And this was the surprising thing about Denney, that the man who had been known as the profound scholar, the distinguished preacher, the accomplished teacher, should also prove himself the man of affairs, endowed with the tactful business art and manifesting unbounded public spirit. It has been pointed out, how as chairman in committee work, he was ideal. Ever patient and courteous, he listened to all views. He disregarded irrelevancies with an instinct that was deadly in its accuracy, and cut down through all entanglements to the real issue. Then he came to a decision, and to this he adhered with unflinching determination. He always spoke with authority—the authority of knowledge, and of clear judgment, certainly, but also the authority of a manifest sincerity and impartiality. He was, however, far more to the Central Fund than an ideal Chairman of the Committee. By his personality, enthusiasm, and his unwearied service in the country, he had lifted the Fund into the central place in the life of the Church which it ought to have. Many realized its importance just because they saw that it was important to a man like Dr. Denney. It was a matter of sincere gratification to the Convener that in the year before he died the minimum stipend of £200



to every minister of the church was so nearly attained. This has been the aim of the Committee for long—by no means an extravagant one in these days of costly living, when every minister is feeling the pinch. It was especially the cause of the rural pastor, the appeal of the country manse that came straight home to the heart of Denney. He realized that these are they upon whom the brunt of the fighting falls. If there are wounds and suffering to be endured, they endure them ; and the distress incurred by many a minister of the Presbyterian Church and his family as a result of the “ narrow circumstances of the house ” is very real and great. The best monument his beloved Church could erect to the memory of Dr. James Denney would be to raise the equal dividend all over the Church to at least £200 as in this year of his passing from us, and to keep it raised.

In the care of the Churches which thus fell upon him, Denney shouldered the burden loyally. There is a certain wistfulness evident in the recorded remark of such a man of so great gifts, who took up the routine of ecclesiastical work of his denomination at the call of duty. A ministerial friend was talking with him one day about Principal Marcus Dods, and reported that Dr. Dods had felt

in his later years that one of the mistakes of his life had been that he had not taken a greater share in the work of the Churches' courts and committees, Dr. Denney said with animated emphasis, "This is most interesting. It is the most interesting thing I have ever heard about Dods." Adds the chronicler, "It looked as if he had recognized in the mind of another great scholar a process of development that had been a reality for his own. Even giants, however, must leave something to other men, and the fact remains that while Dods lived to be 75, Denney has gone at 61. "To what purpose is this waste?" is often thought and sometimes said, when men of such outstanding gifts as his take up the burden of the ecclesiastic.

Of course, his high position brought many calls for Denney's services among the Churches, and he never refused, if fulfilment were within his power. Hence the things which men expect to find were sought in him—wise, practical judgment, keen moral vision, and the power of seeing further than themselves in an emergency. By many a country manse fireside, his rare insight and quaint humour, his tact and sensibility, his quiet and ready sympathy rendered him a welcome guest. For nothing that was human was alien to this great Doctor of the Church. Thus to many

a struggling pastor of a humble flock, discouraged and depressed, came Denney, and left behind him such a gracious influence as heartened the man and caused a new light to shine in his eyes.

To the mistress of the manse also Dr. Denney made appeal as guest. The following note from one gives a glimpse of this, showing his human side.

“ It was decided. The great man had agreed to come. That was splendid for the church, but rather appalling for me. He would be our guest, and I had no maid. My husband had been a student under him, and I had an impression that he was an austere man who would be difficult. He had no children. Would our two terrors annoy him ? He came, straight from the many honours heaped on him by the Assembly of May 1915. How simple he was : so pleased with the arrangements made for his comfort. In a few minutes the children and he were friends. Was *this* Dr. Denney ? This man who was like a child with them. Was this the great man whose coming we had feared ? He left on Monday morning, and our hearts were sore at the parting, for in that brief week-end he had made us love him. In our garden there is a spot hallowed by the memory of him sitting there at rest through

the long summer Sunday between the services. I cherish, too, as one of my most precious possessions, the beautiful, courteous letter of thanks which he, so busy a man, found time to write to me."

There was ever the expression of this fine trait in Denney's character—his deep interest in the welfare of others less favourably placed than himself—and scores of the smaller United Free congregations of Scotland are his debtors. It is gratefully recalled how, in the privacy of the manse, this man whom some were inclined to regard as on a plane aloof and remote from themselves, and with an air of puritanical austerity of life and mind, would strive to draw his humbler *confrères* out of their diffidence and reserve ; how he would labour to discover their special interests, the books that had influenced them, and then to talk of these, for he was emphatically a " Bookman," knowing and understanding them all. While his interests were many-sided, his table-talk on books was especially luminous and informative. Thus, in a South of Scotland country manse, the conversation at one point turned on the relative merits of fast and slow reading of a book. Denney favoured the fast readers, holding that fast reading, and the ability to remember, almost always went together. He

looked on fast reading as an indication of a quick intellect, and on slow reading as denoting a sluggish one, and cited Carlyle and Macaulay, famous as fast readers, as instances in point.

Apropos of the question of unbelief, which came up in the course of conversation, he told a story of Jowett, Master of Balliol, which, though perhaps not new, may be worth repeating. A student came to Jowett one morning and told him that he was troubled with religious doubt. "In fact," said the student, "I regret to confess that I don't believe in God!" "You don't believe in God!" said Jowett. "No sir," said the student, hoping that the great man would clear away his difficulties. But Jowett's reply was crushing. "Believe in God, sir," said Jowett, "by to-morrow morning, or leave the college!"

The incident reminds us of the attitude of the late Professor A. B. Davidson to a young divinity student proud of his doubts. It is referred to by his biographer. Davidson could say very incisive things as well as Jowett. The youth, who was fond of airing his scruples and unbeliefs on every possible occasion, called on Dr. Davidson. A tone of unreality disclosed itself in his recital of his difficulties and perplexities, and the result was rather a chilling

reception. The Professor sat in silence. He accompanied the student to the door when he left. There the young man looked up to the sky and said, "It's a lovely evening." "Oh!" said Davidson incisively, with some trace of astonishment, "are you sure of *that*?"

Sarcasm is the legitimate weapon against pretentiousness and sham, and Denney was a master of the art. His rapier was keen and, when needful, skilfully handled. "From the deliberating pause," says one of his former students, "which almost invariably preceded these strokes, we felt that he was ever conscious of its danger, and almost feared its power.

"Once when counselling us against its use in the pulpit, he quoted Carlyle, 'Sarcasm is the language of the devil.' Then came the pause, and the faint smile and quiver of the lip, which always made the class expectant. 'And one might almost say it was Carlyle's mother-tongue.' The class was convulsed—first one wave of laughter, then a second laugh. The first was our homage to the quaintly worded pungency of the retort; the second laugh was at the Professor himself. He saw it and smiled—a very human, self-amusing smile. He had hoisted himself with his own petard."

Denney, it has been said, wrote no paradoxes ;

to him all epigrams had falsehood written on their face. There may be some justice in the criticism that he liked to have everything about him just a little clearer than things are. So completely was he equipped in scholarship, and in such full command of all his weapons—and these ever at their keenest and brightest—that he could detect any flaw in an opponent's argument with almost supernatural quickness. He was an anti-sciolist, and for the man or student of superficial knowledge he had a profound contempt. Fools he never suffered gladly, as some of the tribe know to their cost. In irony he could be as scornfully severe as Johnson himself. Even to his intimates, in the course of talk, his pertinent "Why?" or "Why not?" dropping from his lips like explosive bullets, not only compelled attention but had a shattering effect on all arrogance, pretence and subterfuge. "Wool-gathering" was at a discount. Mental force had to be quickly mobilized in the bracing and vital mental atmosphere which Denney as a controversialist created.

His directness of style in speech, while it tended to lucidity, sometimes, it must be confessed, made him brusque and "short" as a man with men. His abruptness may even have brought him disfavour in certain

quarters. He was nothing if not direct—circumlocution in any circumstances had no quarter from him. And yet it might be truly said that his heart was tender, if his words were strong. His pastor in College and Kelvingrove Church, Dr. Reith, has testified how, beneath what sometimes seemed a stern exterior, there were springs of deep and tender feeling.

Those who were accustomed to listen to his frequent prayers at the weekly devotional gatherings knew they were in the presence of a man to whom his Saviour was a living reality, and whose very name he would not pronounce without an obvious throb of emotion and subdued tones of pathos, witnessing to the touch of Christ's spirit on his own. All his brilliant gifts were laid humbly and lovingly at the feet of his Lord.

Members of the congregation, too, were aware how loyal Principal Denney was to the duties expected from a member and office-bearer, and how thoroughly he identified himself with the work and worship of this particular church, just as if far wider interests did not claim his concern. That was entirely characteristic of the man. No elder was more faithful than he in the discharge of the common work belonging to that office. It was, Dr. Reith



adds, disconcerting at first, perhaps, to the preacher to have that calm, earnest look fixed on him, kept without faltering on him, whatever the spiritual provision at command. And yet that steadfast gaze emptied the preacher of all desire to be anything he was not and could not be, threw him back on the glory of his message and inspired him to endeavour to rise to the greatness of the opportunity that was his.

Dr. Denney employed his rich gifts to further many good causes which lay near his heart. It was only on rare occasions that he went so far afield as London to speak or preach—all the wide range of his own Church made its special appeal to him, but he never declined an invitation beyond it, if fulfilment were in his power.

Those, for instance, who heard the Principal some years ago when he preached the annual sermon of the Baptist Missionary Society at Bloomsbury Chapel still treasure the thrilling message which he delivered on the occasion.

He had put all denominations in debt to his scholarship and spiritual insight, and people listened to him as they only listen to a man who is wholly devoted to the highest ends. But as we have seen, it was to the interests of his own United Free Church

supremely that Denney gave his time and strength. He loved it to the last. A regular attender of the Presbytery and Assembly as well as of the Kirk Session, those most closely associated with him, realized how deep and practical was his interest in everything which tended to the greater efficiency and enterprise of the work of that Church, and how his inventive mind was always thinking out improvements in organization.

He enjoyed much his intimate relationship with the laymen of the Church. His written correspondence with them rarely failed to contain some sentence apt and wise on the most commonplace topics. In Presbytery he would sometimes let himself go, to the great delight of his auditors. If a subject came up that interested him, whether bearing upon Church polity, aggressive work, social reform or theology, he was ready for the fray. The debate in Glasgow Presbytery on the election of women to the Deacons' Court is still recalled, and how Denney, by opposing the idea, failed for once to carry popular opinion with him. On that tense face was the look of battle, and from the pursed lips came the swift central word which set things in the light in which he at least clearly saw them. Indifference to public opinion when himself convinced on

any point, regardlessness of consequences—*fearlessness*, that was the crowning glory of the man. “Gentlemen,” he would say to his students, with glowing ardour, “I beseech you to remember that there are in every congregation—even the humblest—men and women of ripe Christian experience whose shoe latchet you are not worthy to unloose.” He knew whereof he testified, and conscience was ever in him a burning passion. There was such sensitiveness to all that is high and worthy, that his extraordinary mental gifts were heightened by it. So he came to be spoken of by men of different sorts and conditions as the “conscience” of Scotland incarnate. They had in mind his profound and passionately experimental faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, his essential character of such goodness and devotion, his zeal for his brethren’s well-being, his patriotic impeachment of the liquor interest as a curse calling for suppression not merely “for the period of the war,” but for ever, and his whole-hearted and serious approval of the Allies’ cause. A veritable Greatheart, worn out at length with ungrudging service, there was no man whose verdict was more eagerly looked for on questions of the hour, religious, social or political. In his laborious day he

accomplished a many-sided work and left a name to be long and gratefully remembered. He stands in the true line with Paul and Augustine, with Calvin and Chalmers, of those who have taught the Church to say, "Unto Him be the glory, both now and for ever. Amen."

*The  
Last  
Phase*



## CHAPTER IX

### THE LAST PHASE

JAMES DENNEY was pre-eminently a man of God, and bore about with him an atmosphere of saintliness ; he seemed like one who always walked on the confines of another world, and viewed, with a certain aloofness, the affairs about which most of his contemporaries busied themselves, God took him—the God with whom he closely walked—not weight of years, disease, or even death, but God. And he walked closely with man as well. From the viewpoint of his friends it can be truly said that no one could be long in his company without being conscious of a quickened spiritual life and a deepened earnestness of purpose. His friends believed that he died because he gave himself so generously to the demands of God's cause. Certainly it was this "conscience" for his fellows in his many-sided work that will keep his name alive.

And thou art worthy, full of power,  
As gentle, liberal-minded, great,  
Consistent, wearing all that weight  
Of learning, lightly like a flower.

The strain of recent years, the carrying on of the work of the College in war time, the burden of the Central Fund Convenership where his personality, enthusiasm and anxious and unwearied toil counted for so much, and latterly his ardent advocacy of prohibition, had altogether proved a greater expenditure of nervous energy than one man could bear. Continually spending himself and being spent in the service of God and man, his friends seemed to take it for granted that he was capable of any exertion. He was of this mind himself, until the breaking point came. And then, the pity of it all ! Alas ! for falling trees and broken columns. The loss is terrible.

He held his place—

Held on through blame, and faltered not at praise,  
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down,  
As when a kingly cedar, green with boughs,  
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,  
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

His friend and colleague, Professor Moffatt, testifies concerning this, in a fine appreciation written for *The British Weekly* :

“ The death of his two most intimate friends, the Rev. A. D. Grant and the Rev. J. P. Struthers, meant more to Dr. Denney than he would ever allow others to guess, for he held his feelings on this and other sacred intimacies in a noble reserve. But one had the impression that he felt somewhat lonely in his later years,



especially after his wife's death. He had strong and happy family affections, and he admitted others to his friendship with generous freedom ; there was nothing of the recluse or of the morbid *laudator temporis acti* about him. But when the ranks of a man's contemporaries are thinned, and the old friends and comrades fall, it is not possible for their places to be filled. His colleagues, Professor Orr and Principal Lindsay, left him. Other work took Professor George Adam Smith away, and with him an intellectual and moral stimulus of which he would speak sometimes with a singular note of intensity. Meantime he threw himself into the service of the Church beyond even the range of his own subject, developed business qualities which surprised some who only knew him from his books, and became one of the real leaders of public opinion in the country. The care of the churches fell upon him, and he shouldered it loyally.

“ There came unsought to him that position in which men expect wise judgment, moral vision, and the power of seeing further than themselves in a difficulty. Influence of this kind is never exerted without a drain upon life, of which a man is hardly conscious. Something goes out of him as he gives his sympathy and counsel, and Dr. Denney grew grey under

the mounting responsibilities with which he was honoured. But there was no abating of his spirit. It seemed to those whom he led that every fresh demand revealed something more in him, and one of our keenest regrets to-day is that we shall miss him in the coming readjustment of the Scottish Churches, a problem for which he had acquired some of the qualities which are essential and rare ; there was a sense of confidence in his judgment which made his words tell far and wide, in quarters where the ecclesiastic would not command a following. We counted on him as a factor in the solution. Here and even more in his College, what he said, what he was, mattered as little else did. Now he has been withdrawn from us in the very ripeness of his strength and influence. What that means not even those who were at his side can realize yet."

It does seem tragic that just at the crucial moment when a mind keen and original like his was most needed by his fellow country-men, he should be lost to us.

Principal Denney was seized with illness, one day in the month of February, while lecturing to his class. Preaching at Kirkintilloch on the Sunday previous, and motoring home in an open car, he had evidently caught a chill, the effect of which he was not able

to throw off. From that first illness—the only one in the whole course of his professional career—he never rallied, though he made a brave effort to resume his work. His unwonted cross he bore with patience, only lamenting the resultant breaking off of preaching and other public engagements. From his sick room he wrote on this wise to his friend Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, with whom he had enjoyed an intimate association lasting unclouded for 25 years :

“ I am counting on the open air, which I had not breathed for seven weeks or so, to set me up again. I don't know what was wrong with me : I just collapsed suddenly and completely like the one-hoss shay in O. W. Holmes, and I have spent all these weeks in painfully gathering myself in bits out of the *débris*. I am past the point of despair now, but when I shall be able to do any kind of work with body or brain I cannot foresee. I have been a little astonished at the people who condoled with me on having to postpone the Cunningham Lectures : the things I am sore at being unable to help are the temperance cause and the Central Fund.”

For a time he seemed to be throwing off his illness, thanks to expert medical skill and efficient nursing. On the shores of the

Gareloch, whither he repaired for change of air and scene, he walked about for days in the spring sunshine, but little betterment came. His evenings were brightened by the visits and genial talk of such resident neighbours as the Rev. Dr. W. L. Walker of Lochanbrae and the Rev. Walter E. Ireland, United Free Church manse. Returning to the city, and confined to his room latterly, for many weary weeks, he was allowed to see very few friends, but he had his books, and it was hoped that six months of total rest might restore him. To the last he was devoted to work.

The Greek Testament was constantly in his hand, and his notebooks were close by. There he was, his fertile brain planning new lectures, or with a privileged visitor, *more suo*, talking theology, discussing the contents of Professor Gwatkins' library, summing up Tertullian and other Fathers of the Church, even as he gasped for breath. The physical discomfort he bore bravely, his mind as keen as ever. To a friend he remarked, "My doctor tells me I am improving, but"—and a little, grim smile hovered for a second on his lips—"I don't feel the witness of that in myself as yet." Still there seemed some hope of his getting better. But a few days before the end came he had a collapse, and

he felt that he had finally lain down to die. While he lingered on the Border-land it was evident that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ was all and in all to him. He felt that the ministry of atonement in his case was perfected. There was no outstanding debt. "Jesus paid it all." In the one commanding sacrifice for human sin, Calvary had left nothing for him to do. Years before he had declared these words to be his article of faith,

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood  
Sealed my pardon with His blood,"

and now in the hour and almost in the article of death, he was filling up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ. The sufferings needed a herald. The Gospel required an evangelist. The work of Calvary must proclaim itself in the sacrificial saint.

James Denney's mission had consisted in making the evangel known to Christendom—for this man was a good gift of God to all the Churches, and there was not a branch of spiritual activity that had not been enriched and encouraged by his inspiring words, as well as by the example of his devoted life.

At length came the timely relief of the Last Messenger. The strong spirit passed to its reward. As the tidings of his demise were

carried through the city and spread to the most distant corners of the land there was general sorrow. All denominations united in lamenting the loss of one whose labours had been accomplished not in the service of sect or party, but to advance the truth which is the heritage of the whole Catholic Church. In a simile that Dr. Denney himself had used, regarding the departure of another sainted minister of Christ, his death was like the going out of a bright light ; a darkness that could be felt descended with it on many a heart. But heaven was so near to him and so real, that he would very likely have thought it wrong to speak thus, and with all our sorrowful remembrance of him, we thank God with full hearts for giving us such a man, such a Christian, and such a friend. And as we glorify God in him, we pray that the true apostolic and saintly succession of God's great and gifted ones may never cease until this weary, time-worn world has passed through all the phases of its travail and its discipline, and is merged in the shadowless light, and the ineffable love of the Eternal.

The funeral took place on Friday, the 15th June, 1917. A private service at the house, 15, Lilybank Gardens, was conducted by the Rev. G. A. Frank Knight, M.A., College and

Kelvingrove Church, of which Principal Denney was an office-bearer. A public service was afterwards held in the College, where he had given such distinguished service. In front of the platform, on a catafalque covered by a purple pall, lay the oak coffin, on which rested many beautiful floral tributes. The Rev. Professor Forrest, Moderator of the Glasgow Presbytery of the United Free Church of Scotland, presided, and the service was conducted after the severely simple Presbyterian form, those taking part including the Rev. Principal Iverach, Aberdeen; the Rev. Professor H. A. A. Kennedy, Edinburgh; the Rev. Professor George Milligan; and the Rev. Dr. George Reith.

The large company of mourners assembled from far and near, representative of various sections of the public—religious, academic, social, and civic—reflected the high and widespread esteem entertained for the distinguished theologian. Within the building there were many manifestations of the feeling of profound sorrow which pervaded the whole community. The gathering was one of men and women whose hearts were deeply moved. At the close of the service, to the strains of Handel's immortal March, the coffin was borne to the hearse, and the funeral procession to the Western Necropolis was formed four deep.

It was a wonderful and spontaneous expression of the hold Dr. Denney had taken on the affections of the people. A service at the grave-side in "God's acre," within sight of the city he had loved and served so well, was conducted by the Rev. Dr. John S. Carroll and the Rev. Professor Mackintosh. All that was mortal of James Denney rests by the side of his wife, and the tombstone is inscribed, "Because I live, ye shall live also." On that lovely June afternoon, when the songs of the birds were in the air, the flowers in their sweetest bloom and the glorious sunshine and warmth flooding everything, all nature seemed to typify the grandeur of the new life to which the spirit had attained, and the touching prayer of committal tended to raise the thoughts of the mourners to the God of all comfort; confirmed their faith in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and recalled to mind the words of the Immortal Dreamer—"The pilgrim they laid in a chamber whose window opened towards the sunrising; the name of that chamber was *PEACE!* where he slept till the break of day."



## In Memoriam : James Denney.

JUNE 11, 1917.

BY REV. W. R. THOMSON, B.D.

Friend, who hast fallen 'mid the din of war,  
Take now thy portion of the soldier's sleep ;  
For thou, God's sentry, didst thy vigil keep,  
Nor watched with idle eye the strife from far.

Naught trivial found a home within thy mind,  
Nor any baseness in thy spirit's place ;  
Self's spectre fled the daybreak of thy face  
To herd in dark confusion with its kind.

The light of thought enthroned upon thy brow  
Its splendid largesse flung upon our way ;  
God's benison to one who loved the day,  
Whose riches did us poorer men endow.

And when the shadow fell, and bugles shrill  
Blew war's fierce challenge all about the land,  
Who more than thou, at Duty's high command,  
Didst toil to fortify the nation's will ?

Who more than thou didst toil to feed the flame  
Of high resolve ? to keep inviolate  
Our troth with those—to honour dedicate—  
Who reap on fields of death a deathless fame ?

Ah, silent now that voice of quiet power,  
And dark the eye that kindled at the call  
Of God within, and stilled beneath the pall  
The valiant heart that held faith's endless dower.

Blow the Last Post across the soldier saint,  
Give to the wind and sun our sorrow deep ;  
Friend, take thy portion of the soldier's sleep,  
Thou who didst march God's way and didst not faint.

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